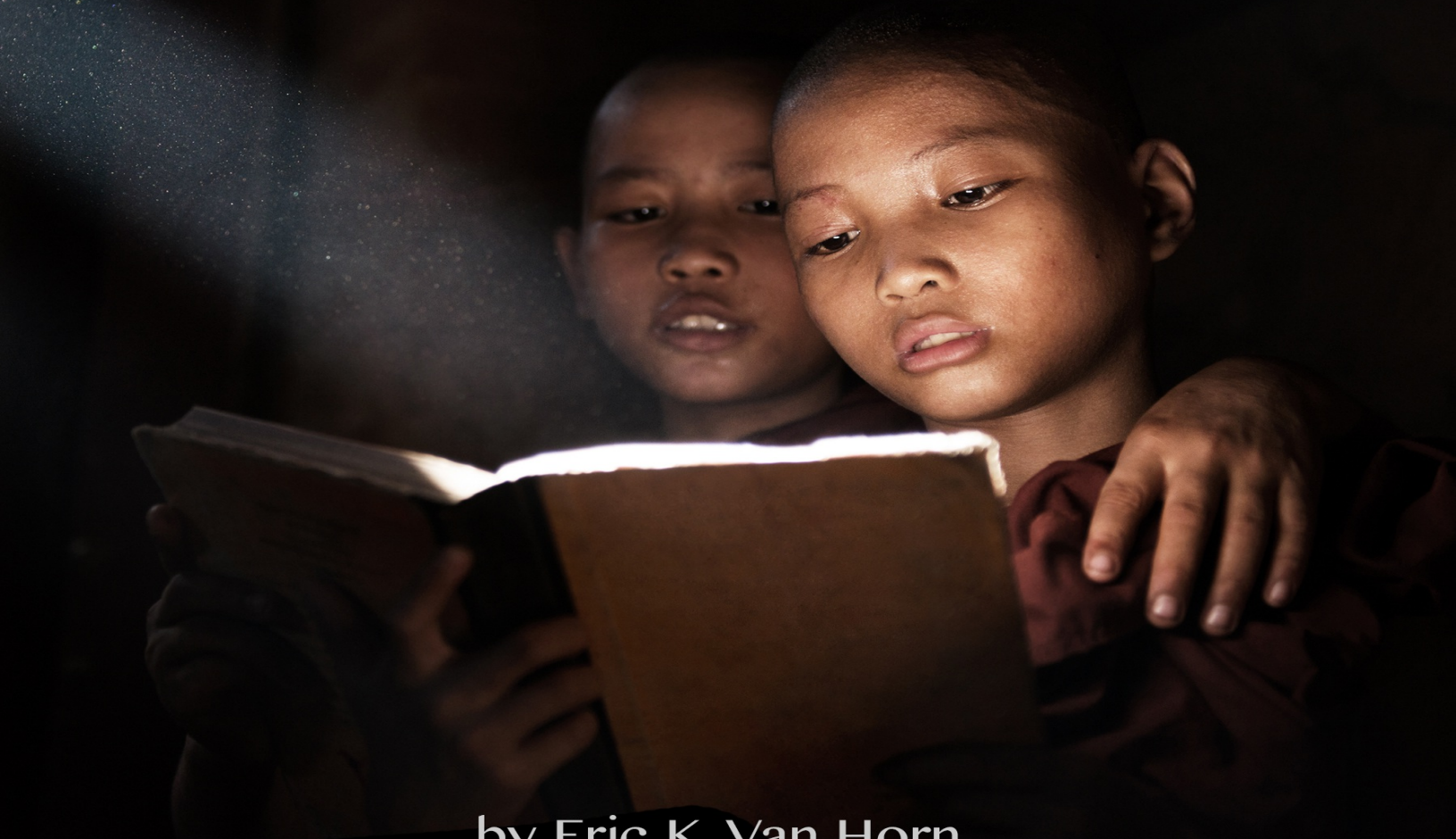
Book 6 in the *Little Books on Buddhism* Series

The Little Book of Buddhist Daily Living

The Discipline for Lay People



by Eric K. Van Horn

1.

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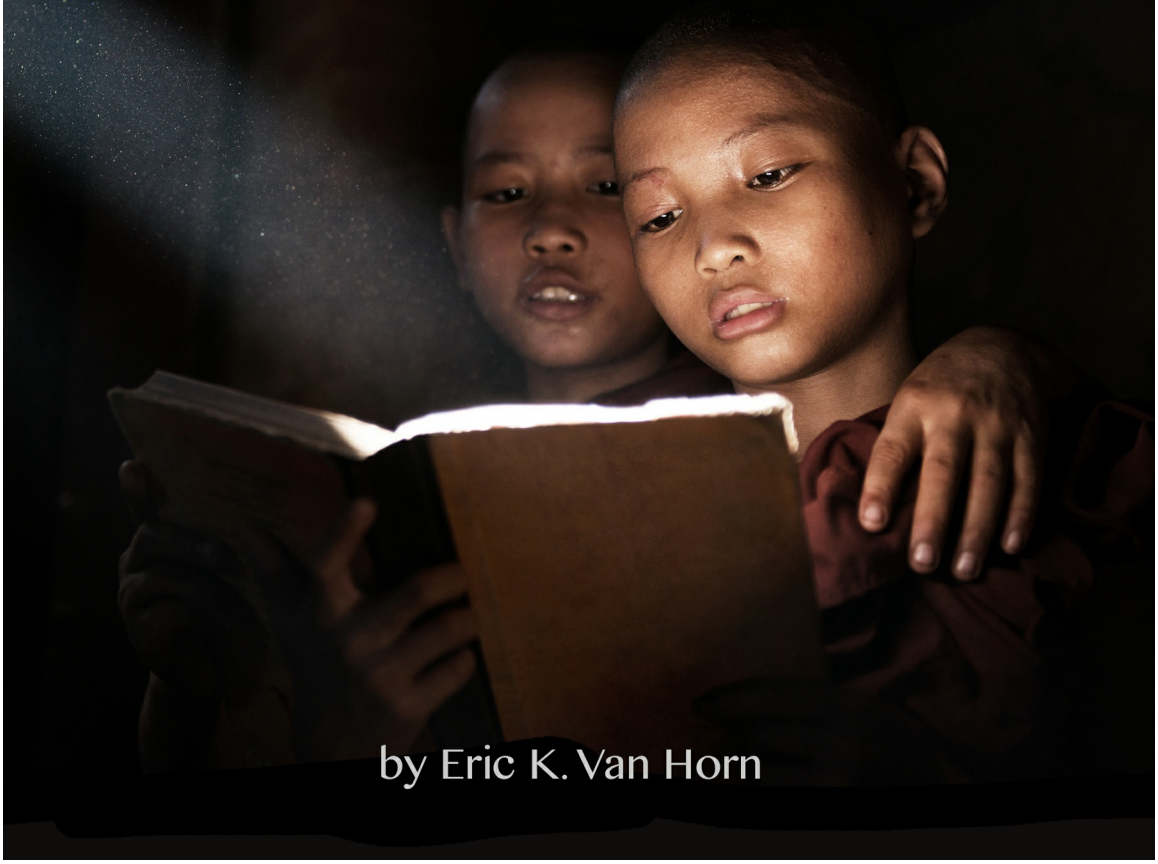

by Eric K. Van Horn

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The Little Book of Buddhist Daily Living

The Discipline for Lay People

by Eric K. Van Horn

Dedicated to the great American mystic

Henry David Thoreau.

Let me say to you and to myself in one breath: Cultivate the tree which you have found to bear fruit in your soil. Regard not your past failures nor successes. All the past is equally a failure and a success; it is success in as much as it offers you the present opportunity.
- [Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*, 1850]

"'The safe and good path to be traveled joyfully' is a term for the Noble Eight Book Path."

The Little Books on Buddhism series:

Book 1: *The Little Book of Buddhist Meditation: Establishing a daily meditation practice*

Book 2: *The Little Book on Buddhist Virtue: The Buddha's teachings on happiness through skillful conduct*

Book 3: *The Little Book of the Life of the Buddha*

Book 4: *The Little Book of Buddhist Wisdom: The Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths, the three marks of existence, causality, and karma*

Book 5: *The Little Book of Buddhist Mindfulness & Concentration*

Book 6: *The Little Book of Buddhist Daily Living: The Discipline for Lay People*

Book 7: *The Little Book of Buddhist Rebirth*

Book 8: *The Little Book of Buddhist Awakening: The Buddha's instructions on attaining enlightenment*

Also by this author:

The Travel Guide to the Buddha's Path

The photograph on the title page is my parents on their wedding day.

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Preface

These ten, great King, are the virtues of the lay-follower:
He shares the joys and sorrows of the Saṇgha;
He places the Dhamma first;
He enjoys giving according to his ability;
If he sees a decline in the Dispensation of the Teaching of the Buddha, he strives for its strong growth;
He has right views, disregarding belief in superstitions and omens; he will not accept any other teacher, not even for the sake of his life;
He guards his deeds and words;
He loves and cherishes peace and concord;
He is not envious or jealous;
He does not live a Buddhist life by way of deception or hypocrisy;
He has gone for refuge to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṇgha.
- [*Milindapañha*, Ch. IV]

I am a little embarrassed at how long it took me to address the subject of Buddhism in daily living. In my defense, I live as a full-time Buddhist. I retired a few years ago to devote myself to the practice. In my own life, I try to bridge the gap between being a monk and a layperson.

But I certainly have plenty of practice working, raising a family, ushering a mother through the end of her life, and doing all the things that every other lay Buddhist has to do. And I know what a struggle that can be.

Coupled with *The Little Book on Mindfulness & Concentration*, this book represents the advanced training. The first four books in the series encompass a basic practice. In those books, the book on virtue describes the Buddha's teachings on ethics and morality. They provide the

framework for how to behave in the world, what the Buddha called "the discipline."

In terms of the canonical literature, this book is roughly equivalent to the Vinaya, which sits next to and parallel to the suttas. But how this book fits in with the rest is a little like the joke I tell about *Inside Macintosh*, the technical documentation for the first Macintosh computer, and that is that to understand one part you have to understand all the other parts.

As Western lay Buddhists, we emulate a lot of what traditionally only monks and nuns have done. We have created a challenge for ourselves. That is one reason that I think it is very important that we have patience and compassion for ourselves. What we are attempting to do is not easy. But it is noble, and when practice is difficult for you hold your head high and proceed with dignity. You have earned it.

Eric Van Horn
Rio Rancho, New Mexico
31-Oct-2016
nobleeightfoldblog.com

Terminology and Conventions

Because the Buddhist Canon that I use is in the Pāli language, I usually use Pāli terms. However, some Sanskrit Buddhist terms have become common in the English language and it seems rather affected not to use them. The two most obvious examples are the words "nirvāṇa," which is "nibbāna" in Pāli, and "Dharma," which is "Dhamma" in Pāli. For the most part, I use the commonly known terms. But if it seems awkward to have the Pāli terms in quotes or in certain words (like *Dhammacakkappavattana*) and use the Sanskrit terms in the main text, I use the Pāli words.

I try to avoid technical terms in the beginning of the guide until you can get used to them. However, if there are terms with which you are unfamiliar, they should be in the glossary in Appendix A.

As per APA style guidelines, book names are italicized (i.e., *Foundations of Buddhism*) and magazine articles and Internet resources are capitalized and quoted (i.e., "The Benefits of Walking Meditation").

Internet Conventions

There are many references to resources that are on the Internet. This is always a problem because hyperlinks are notoriously unreliable. Thus, I have adopted a convention of putting Internet search keywords in the text as well as a hyperlink to the resource. For example, a reference to Thich Nhat Hahn's gāthās ("poems") is "thich nhat hanh gathas here and now." If links are supported and the link is not broken, clicking on the search keywords will open that resource. If you are reading this in a context where Internet links are not supported or the link is broken, you can still find the resource by doing a search using the keywords. If you use the search keywords, the resource should be the first one in the search result list.

The other case is when an article is cited. It will look like this:

- [Sayadaw U Silananda, "The Benefits of Walking Meditation"]

Again, if your reader does not support hyperlinks or the link is broken, searching on the author's name and the article name should get you to the article. Some names and words use diacritical marks and you may have to remove them to find the correct resource. For example, for the name "Ṭhānissaro" use the non-diacritical form "Thanissaro."

Abbreviations Used for Pāli Text References

AN: *Aṇguttara Nikāya, The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*

Bv: *Buddhavaṃsa, Chronicle of Buddhas*

BvA: *Buddhavaṃsatthakathā*, commentary to the *Buddhavaṃsa*

Cv: *Cullavagga, the "smaller book,"* the second volume in the *Khandhaka*, which is the second book of the monastic code (the Vinaya)

Dhp: *Dhammapada, The Path of Dhamma*, a collection of 423 verses

DhpA: *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*, commentary to the *Dhammapada*

DN: *Digha Nikāya, The Long Discourses of the Buddha*

Iti: *Itivuttaka, This Was Said* (by the Buddha), a.k.a., Sayings of the Buddha

Ja: *Jātaka Tales*, previous life stories of the Buddha

JaA: *Jātaka-aṭṭhakathā*, commentary on the *Jātaka Tales*

Khp: *Khuddakapāṭha, Short Passages*

MA: *Majjhima Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā*, commentary on the *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (by Buddhaghosa)

MN: *Majjhima Nikāya, The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*

Mv: *Mahāvagga*, the first volume in the *Khandhaka*, which is the second book of the monastic code (the Vinaya)

Pm: *Pātimokkha, The Code of Monastic Discipline*, the first book of the monastic code (the Vinaya)

SN: *Saṃyutta Nikāya, The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*

S Nip: *Sutta Nipāta, The Sutta Collection*, literally, "suttas falling down," a sutta collection in the *Khuddaka Nikāya* consisting mostly of verse

Sv: *Sutta-vibhaṇga: Classification of the Suttas*, the "origin stories" for the Pātimokkha rules

Thag: *Theragāthā: Verses of the Elder Monks*

ThagA: *Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā*, Commentary to the *Theragāthā*

Thig: *Therīgāthā: Verses of the Elder Nuns*

ThigA: *Therīgāthā-aṭṭhakathā*, Commentary to the *Therīgāthā*

Ud: *Udana, Exclamations*, the third book of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*

Vin: *Vinaya Pitaka, Basket of Discipline*, the monastic rules for monks and nuns.

1. Introduction

“Mother, father are the east,
Teachers are the southward point,
Wife and children are the west,
Friends and colleagues are the north.
Servants and workers are below,
Ascetics, Brahmins are above.
These directions all should be
Honored by a clansman true.
He who’s wise and disciplined,
Kindly and intelligent,
Humble, free from pride,
Such a one may honor gain.
Early rising, scorning sloth,
Unshaken by adversity,
Of faultless conduct, ready wit,
Such a one may honor gain.
Making friends, and keeping them,
Welcoming, no stingy host,
A guide, philosopher and friend,
Such a one may honor gain.
Giving gifts and kindly speech,
A life well-spent for others’ good,
Even-handed in all things,
Impartial as each case demands:
These things make the world go round
Like the chariot’s axle-pin.
If such things did not exist,
No mother from her son would get
Any honor and respect,

Nor father either, as their due.
But since these qualities are held
By the wise in high esteem,
They are given prominence
And are rightly praised by all."
- [DN 31.34]

The way that Buddhism landed in the West is not the same as it is traditionally practiced in Asia. Asian Buddhism is centered around the monasteries and temples. Lay Buddhists practice generosity by supporting the monks and nuns. They give alms-food. On Uposatha Days laypeople go to the temples and monasteries. They spend the day there. They follow the Eight Precepts. For the most part, lay Buddhists in Asia do not meditate.

But in the West our practice is mainly based in the laity. Most lay Buddhists here do meditate. We practice in a way that lies somewhere between Asian lay practice and monastic practice. In doing this we have created a challenge for ourselves.

Monastics have rules laid down in the Vinaya that control almost every part of their lives. The large number of rules may sound restrictive, but it actually makes their lives simple. They do not have to spend time and energy thinking about what appropriate behavior is. That is already defined.

The Saṇgha takes care of their needs. If they are sick or dying, the Saṇgha takes care of them. When someone ordains, this is also called "homeleaving." They leave their biological families and enter the family of the Saṇgha. Ordaining as a monk or nun may sound restrictive to a layperson, but it is actually quite liberating. And it makes practicing the Dharma simple and optimal.

Life for lay Buddhists is more complicated. We spend a lot of our lives dealing with right livelihood. A monk or a nun is by definition practicing right livelihood. The Buddha gives lay people some guidance on what

right livelihood is, but there is a lot of gray area. I had jobs where I was not sure that what we were doing followed the letter and the spirit of the Five Precepts. Sometimes you just don't know.

We also spend a lot of time on relationships. This includes our families, spouses and significant others, work and neighbor relationships. Sometimes these relationships are quite complicated and difficult. Monks and nuns have rules that govern their relationships, and they have rules for resolving disputes. But we are in the outside world. There are no rules for how people treat each other. There may be extreme cases like sexual abuse or being financially swindled. Work relationships tend to be particularly difficult.

Many of us also belong to lay Buddhist communities. This offers, at least, a common approach to life. But lay Buddhist groups lack the moral authority and guidance of monastics, who are religious professionals.

In Asia lay Buddhists follow the Five Precepts, practice generosity, and beyond that they rely on the monasteries and temples for religious authority. But here in the West, we need more than the Five Precepts. We need something like a lay Buddhist Vinaya.

I read recently that someone in a Zen group was having trouble bringing his practice into daily life, and he discussed it with one of the teachers. That teacher said that in Zen, the practice comes into daily life after you have had a meditative breakthrough. This is essentially what I was told when I was practicing Zen.

But this is not how the Buddha taught. He taught the gradual path. It is rooted in virtue, and virtue requires that we constantly evaluate our actions of body, speech, and mind. This is how we progress along the path. This is how we, as Larry Rosenberg says, learn our way out of suffering.

In Buddhism we use the word "practice." I think this is a good word with a few caveats. Buddhists do not practice the way that athletes do. Athletes practice, and this is separate from the real game. But for us as

Buddhists, there is no difference. Practice and real life are the same things.

I don't know that this book satisfies the need for a lay Buddhist Vinaya, but perhaps it is a start. Lay life is by definition more complicated and messier. I'm not sure that it is possible to meet the exacting standards of the Vinaya.

But what I hope this book will do is provide some guidance. I reviewed the Vinaya to get an idea of the monastic code. I also looked at what the Buddha told lay people in his discourses, what advice he gave them. But I also relied on personal experience, and sometimes it is just some advice that is in the spirit of Buddhist living.

I hope that this advice can help bring the Buddha's teachings into each moment of daily life, to take the practice off of the cushion, to break down the division between what happens in meditation and what happens out of it. The Buddha's teachings only have meaning if that is the case.

2. Kindness

We once brought one of our teachers to the United States from India. After he had been here for some time, we asked him for his perspective on our Buddhist practice in America. While he was mostly positive about what he saw, one critical thing stood out. Our teacher said that those practicing here in the West sometimes reminded him of people in a rowboat. They row and row and row with great earnestness and effort, but they neglect to untie the boat from the dock. He said he noticed people striving diligently for powerful meditative experiences – wonderful transcendence, going beyond space, time, body and mind – but not seeming to care so much about how they relate to others in a day-to-day way. How much compassion do they express toward the plumber who is late, or the child who makes a mess? How much kindness? How much presence? The path may lead to many powerful and sublime experiences, but the path begins here with our daily interactions with each other.

- [Sharon Salzberg, *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*]

When I look back on my experiences in the Buddhist world I am amazed at how badly I have sometimes been treated. I even left a group that I started because of the cruel way I was treated by one of the members. Once I joined an online chat group, and with my very first post got a nasty email from one of the other members demanding that I identify myself. All my personal information was in my profile, but he never bothered to look. I resigned from that online group shortly after that.

Now to be sure, I am probably not guilt-free either. When you are around enough people enough times, you are bound to say or do something unskillful. But it is the unfiltered nature of some of those experiences that surprised me. It felt like even trying to be kind or patient was not on their agenda.

The Buddha never said this but I will. If awakening - becoming enlightened - just makes you a nasty person to be around, then I am not sure what the point is. You are better off not meditating or studying the teachings of the Buddha and being a nice person than the other way around.

So many of the Buddha's teachings are fundamentally about kindness. This includes the brahma vihāras, the noble abidings: lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. They are called noble for a reason. There are the pāramīs, the perfections: generosity, virtue, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, honesty, determination, lovingkindness, and equanimity. They are perfections. There are the four types of right speech: honesty, abstaining from cruel speech, abstaining from speaking behind someone's back, and abstaining from gossip. They are right. They are correct and proper. There are the Five Precepts, the guidelines for virtuous behavior.

The Buddha's way is not about what we believe. It is about how we conduct ourselves.

If you do not ever meditate again or read another book on Buddhism but you cultivate kindness, then the world and you will be better off for it. And yes, of course, none of us is perfect. But we have to at least set it as a goal. We have to make it a priority. We have to make it *the* priority.

Remember the Buddha's advice to his seven-year-old son Rāhula:

> *"Also, Rāhula, after you have done an action with the body, you should reflect upon that same bodily action thus: 'Did this action that I did with the body lead to my*

own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both? Was it an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results?' When you reflect, if you know: 'This action that I did with the body led to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it was an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results,' then you should confess such a bodily action, reveal it, and lay it open to the Teacher or to your wise companions in the holy life. Having confessed it, revealed it, and laid it open, you should undertake restraint for the future. But when you reflect, if you know: 'This action that I did with the body did not lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it was a wholesome bodily action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results,' you can abide happy and glad, training day and night in wholesome states." - [MN 61.11]

We all come to this practice with challenges. But the Buddha's teachings are devoid of personal shame. Notice that quote to Rāhula. The Buddha never said that you should feel bad about yourself. In a way, it is quite clinical. Simply look at what you did. Was it skillful? If the answer is "no" then don't do that again. If the answer is "yes" then keep doing it. We grow by learning, not by feeling terrible.

So we try to be kind to each other, and this is not just to our Dharma brothers and sisters. It is very important to sensitize ourselves to those who suffer. There are a lot of invisible people in the world. We need to train ourselves to see them, to make them visible:

During my second month of college, our professor gave us a pop quiz. I was a conscientious student and had breezed through the questions, until I read the last one:

“What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?”

Surely this was some kind of joke. I had seen the cleaning woman several times. She was tall, dark-haired and in her 50s, but how would I know her name? I handed in my paper, leaving the last question blank. Just before class ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward our quiz grade.

“Absolutely,” said the professor. “In your careers, you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say “hello.”

I’ve never forgotten that lesson. I also learned her name was “Dorothy.”

- [Amy Taylor, brainsonfire.com]

As I write this in the United States we are going through a contentious political period, and there has been a lot of hate and fear mongering, especially toward immigrants. And as I was contemplating the topic of kindness, it reminded me of something that happened to me many years ago.

My sister and I were in Newark, Delaware visiting our mother, and we went out to dinner at a Mexican restaurant. The poor waitress seemed like she had been in the country maybe three days. She hardly spoke a word of English. We were trying to communicate that we wanted separate checks. Fortunately my sister lived in New Mexico and knew just enough Spanish to get that across.

But what left an impression on me was this young woman. She was trying desperately to do her job. She was nervous, anxious, and unsure of

herself. Who knows if she was even legal. It was really a heartbreaking moment.

These are the people that we need to see, even if it is just to acknowledge them, and give them a reassuring smile. We are all people. We all need a helping hand from time to time. But to lend a helping hand you first have to see, and then you have to open your heart. To be sure, sometimes you will be taken advantage of. So be it. It is better to overcorrect on the side of kindness, compassion, and generosity than to be stingy and cold. And you might want to over tip every once in a while. It might warm someone's heart. It should certainly warm yours.

3. Simplicity

Life is full of daily responsibilities. We have families. Most of us have jobs or we are in school. We have to pay bills, clean the house, and so on. As you read this, you have a life situation. For some of you this is complicated. Perhaps you are a caretaker for a parent or significant other or child. For other people there may not be as many responsibilities. Life serves itself up to us, and sometimes that requires our attention.

This is not just an issue for lay people. The Buddhist monk Ajahn Analāyo had to return to Germany from Asia to take care of his aging parents. Being a monk or a nun does not give you a free pass on life's responsibilities.

One question is, "How much new responsibility do we want to take on?" Another is, "Can we shed some of our current responsibilities in order to simplify our lives?"

The Buddha recommended "recluseship" as the optimal way to cultivate the Dharma. He even defined the ultimate goal of the Dharma to be the attainment of recluseship:

> *"What more is to be done? Bhikkhus, you should train thus: 'Our livelihood shall be purified, clear and open, flawless and restrained, and we will not laud ourselves and disparage others on account of that purified livelihood.' Now, bhikkhus, you may think thus: 'We are possessed of shame and fear of wrongdoing, our bodily conduct, verbal conduct, and mental conduct have been purified, and our livelihood has been purified. That much is enough…'; and you may rest content with that much. Bhikkhus, I inform you, I declare to you: You who seek the recluse's status, do not fall short of the goal of*

recluseship while there is more to be done." - [MN 39.7]

"Recluseship" is another way of saying "simplify." Our tendency is often to complicate our lives. Nothing complicates life more than bringing new people and new situations in it. Sometimes this is unavoidable, and sometimes it is not.

Ajahn Analāyo suggests that whatever your life situation, be careful about bringing new responsibilities into it. And if you bring new people – or even animals – into your life, how does that serve the Dharma? Bringing a monk or a nun into your life is one thing. Bringing a new lover into it is quite another.

We often gravitate toward making our lives more complicated because it makes us feel important. It reinforces our sense of a solid self.

Simplification may feel selfish, but it is not. The gift of simplification is a gift to the world. It is an example to other people. It is a way to take less from the planet and from others.

Anyone who has tried to simplify his or her life knows how hard this is to do. It is a uniquely personal thing. How much do you need? The answer to that is different for everyone. No one can answer that for you.

There is a distinction between material objects that fulfill an aesthetic purpose and those things that are pure consumption. That big HDTV, well, what does that do to make your life better? Is it just there so you can waste your Sundays watching football?

I have very few neighbors who use their garages for their cars because they are full of stuff. I doubt that they even know what is in their garages. Then there are all these storage businesses. More stuff. And here in New Mexico, my goodness, everyone seems to have a new pickup truck and an RV. The RVs usually sit in their yards for 11 ½ months at a time. What is the point of that?

There comes a time where the stuff owns you. In fact, I think that is the

normal case. I had a friend who bought a boat one year. And halfway through the summer she said she was already tired of it. She said that she felt that because they had the boat that she and her husband had to use it every weekend. It was dictating how they spent their time. I am also guessing that they financed it, so they had the payments, too. I don't think this is a way to be happy.

One of the things that I enjoy about going on retreat is the simplicity. And I remember from the days when I could do long backpacking trips how when I got home, I marveled at all the stuff I had in my house. When you are hiking, you carry everything you need on your back. There is something liberating about that.

You may also be aware of the tiny house movement. These are houses that are not only affordable but are portable. They are an ingenious and creative use of small space and fewer resources.

Obviously you are going to have to look at your own life and see what you can do to make your life simpler and happier. Sometimes that means getting rid of material possessions, and sometimes that means extracting yourself from complicated involvements with people and organizations. But understand that these are all choices. Make sure that you understand the consequences of the choices that you are making.

4. Money

Here in the West, and in the United States in particular, we have a toxic relationship to money. This is based on the false premise that having money and things will make us happy. Turn on the TV and you will see a litany of ads that tell you that if you buy something, then you will be a happier person.

My sister is a Certified Financial Planner, and she used to give seminars in which the first question that she asked was, "What is the most important thing in your life?" Everyone in the class got a chance to respond. You would hear things like "my children" or "my family" or my "girl/boyfriend" or my dog or whatever it was. It was always something uniquely personal. On a rare occasion a guy might say "his car," but it was almost always about something very personal, especially a relationship.

She would then read back to them what they had all said, noting that no one said "money."

We get these constant messages about how important money and things are, but our own inner wisdom is smarter than that. We just have to listen to ourselves.

The Second Noble Truth is, of course, about "craving." The source of our suffering is craving. It is greed. And no, greed is not good. One of our most compelling drives is to acquire wealth. It is a futile strategy for happiness. In fact, it just feeds the cause of our suffering.

Having said that, poverty is no fun, either. I can say that from personal experience. I would never, ever glorify poverty. Now, of course, there are different kinds of poverty. Monks and nuns live in financial poverty. But I think most of them would say that they have rich lives. So that is a positive, intentional kind of poverty. It is a unique lifestyle that comes

with certain tradeoffs, but one with which I think most monastics are quite happy.

Being a layperson, however, and never quite being able to pay the bills, or in even worse situations where there is not enough to eat or proper clothing to wear or proper shelter is extremely oppressive. In the Buddhist tradition, it is generally accepted that in order for Buddhism to thrive, there must be prosperity and political stability. Buddhists vow not to harm or kill, and it is very hard to do that in societies that are poor, violent, and unstable.

It is also common for people to think of money and prosperity as being inherently evil. That is most definitely not in the Buddha's teachings.

Having money lets us be generous. It lets us support our families. It lets us support the Dharma. All of these things are positive. And if you have earned your money by the fruits of your own labor and you have done it through right livelihood, there is great value in that as well. If you have inherited it, that is your own good fortune. These are all positive actions in your life, and if they happen to you, you should be grateful. Good for you, and now the question is how to skillfully use it for the benefit of yourself and others.

In the *Aṇguttara Nikāya* there is a section called "Worthy Deeds" that says a lot about the benefits of wealth. First the Buddha said that wealth "acquired by energetic striving" enables us to support our families and ourselves:

> *(1) "Here, householder, with wealth acquired by energetic striving… righteously gained, the noble disciple makes himself happy and pleased and properly maintains himself in happiness; he makes his parents happy and pleased and properly maintains them in happiness; he makes his wife and children, his slaves, workers, and servants happy and pleased and properly maintains them in happiness; he makes his friends and companions*

happy and pleased and properly maintains them in happiness. This is the first case of wealth that has gone to good use, that has been properly utilized and used for a worthy cause." - [AN 4.61]

Next, wealth enables us to protect against unexpected events like earthquakes, fire, floods, thieves, and so on:

(2) "Again, with wealth acquired by energetic striving… righteously gained, the noble disciple makes provisions against the losses that might arise from fire, floods, kings, thieves, or displeasing heirs; he makes himself secure against them. This is the second case of wealth that has gone to good use… for a worthy cause."

Third, wealth permits us to support relatives, guests, etc:

(3) "Again, with wealth acquired by energetic striving… righteously gained, the noble disciple makes the five oblations: to relatives, guests, ancestors, the king, and the deities. This is the third case of wealth that has gone to good use… for a worthy cause."

And fourth, wealth permits us to support the noble disciples, the Saṇgha:

(4) "Again, with wealth acquired by energetic striving… righteously gained, the noble disciple establishes an uplifting offering of alms — an offering that is heavenly, resulting in happiness, conducive to heaven — to those ascetics and brahmins who refrain from intoxication and heedlessness, who are settled in patience and mildness, who tame themselves, calm themselves, and train themselves for nibbāna. This is the fourth case of wealth that has gone to good use, that has been properly

employed and used for a worthy cause.

"These, householder, are the four worthy deeds that the noble disciple undertakes with wealth acquired by energetic striving, amassed by the strength of his arms, earned by the sweat of his brow, righteous wealth righteously gained. When anyone exhausts wealth on anything apart from these four worthy deeds, that wealth is said to have gone to waste, to have been squandered, to have been used frivolously. But when anyone exhausts wealth on these four worthy deeds, that wealth is said to have gone to good use, to have been properly used, to have been utilized for a worthy cause."

The very foundation of Buddhism is built on a structure that requires prosperity and wealth to survive.

I am sure that you noticed that this is wealth "acquired by energetic striving." It is the fruit of your labor. The Buddha not only praised wealth that is nobly attained, he also praised hard work and skill in acquiring it.

The only way to use wealth to guard against unexpected calamities is to manage your wealth, to save something for a rainy day. The Buddha advised us to live sensibly, to distribute our wealth wisely, and to be financially responsible.

In the "Sigālovada Sutta: The Buddha's Advice to Sigālaka" the Buddha went into more detail on how to manage your money. First he told us not to squander it:

"And what six ways of squandering wealth are to be avoided? Young man, heedlessness caused by intoxication, roaming the streets at inappropriate times, habitual partying, compulsive gambling, bad

companionship, and laziness are the six ways of squandering wealth." - [DN 31.7]

Then he gave us some fourth century BCE financial planning advice:

"He should divide his wealth in four
(This will most advantage bring).
One part he may enjoy at will,
Two parts he should put to work,
The fourth part he should set aside
As reserve in times of need."
- [DN 31.26]

So here is a summary:

1. Earn your money by diligent hard work, skill in your trade or business, and by right livelihood.
2. Use your wealth to support your family.
3. Use your wealth to protect against unexpected calamities.
4. Use your wealth to support others.
5. Use your wealth to support the Saṇgha of monks and nuns.
6. Do not squander your wealth through drunkenness, partying, gambling, bad friends (especially those who would take advantage of you), or laziness.
7. Divide your income into four parts. One is for you. Two are for reinvesting in your future. And the last one is saving for a rainy day.

You may need to divide your money up in a somewhat different way, but the point is to manage your money in a responsible way.

You should never feel like having wealth and prosperity is something of which to be ashamed. You can do a great deal of good through the ethical acquisition and skillful management of money. And there is a great deal of joy that can come from supporting good people and noble causes.

5. Work

Every layperson has to deal with the issue of how to earn a living. This is right livelihood in the Noble Eightfold Path.

The young man who was to become the Buddha grew up in a vibrant city of crafts, trades, and economic activity. H.W. Schumann gives us an idea of what it was like in the Buddha's hometown of Kapilavatthu:

> *Around the bazaar, not far from the better residential quarters, were concentrated the shops and workshops of the more luxurious and elegant trades, each in its own street: bankers and gold merchants, ivory carvers, clothiers and perfumers, brass and iron merchants, dealers in rice, condiments and sweetmeats. Every branch of industry, and every trade, was formed into a guild, which exercised extensive regulatory functions. The guild decided questions of production and sale, fixed prices, which even the local rāja accepted, took part in training of apprentices and even interfered in the domestic differences of members; if necessary the guild also looked after the widows of deceased members. Their pride showed itself in guild insignia which were carried on the occasion of public festivities, and also in the fact that the guild banned unworthy members from plying their trade – which often amounted to a sentence of beggary. All decisions were taken by a guild council, at the head of which was a guild chairman. Above him was the guild president, who represented the interests of the particular branch of traded externally. He was usually purveyor to the court, and frequented the rāja's palace.*

- [H.W. Schumann, *The Historical Buddha*]

Bankers had a particularly important place in Indian society:

> *The richest guild was that of the bankers. Their main source of income came from moneylending, for which there were fixed rates of interest...*
>
> *The moneylenders, who belonged almost exclusively to the merchant [class], were not very high on the social scale, but in point of influence they were the leaders.*

- [H.W. Schumann, *The Historical Buddha*]

The bankers funded trade expeditions, making the growth and expansion of the economy possible.

I mention all of this because in modern times bankers have taken quite a hit on their reputation. But as with so many things in life, what you do is not as important as how you do it. Bankers make it possible for people to buy houses and start businesses. They provide a secure place for our money. They provide vehicles for investment.

The most famous benefactor in Buddhist history and an archetype for generosity in Buddhism was Anāthapiṇḍika. Anāthapiṇḍika was, among other things, a banker.

The Buddha grew up in this time of great economic activity and expansion. His discourses are full of similes about trade and crafts:

> *"Just as a skilled potter or his apprentice might create and fashion out of well-prepared clay any shape of pot he wished; or just as a skilled ivory-worker or his apprentice might create and fashion out of well-prepared ivory any ivory work of art he wished; or just as a skilled goldsmith or his apprentice might create and fashion out of well-*

prepared gold any gold work of art he wished; so too, I have proclaimed to my disciples the way to wield the various kinds of supernormal power…” - [MN 77.31]

“Bhikkhus, when a cowherd possesses eleven factors, he is capable of keeping and rearing a herd of cattle. What eleven? Here a cowherd has knowledge of form, he is skilled in characteristics, he picks out flies’ eggs, he dresses wounds, he smokes out the sheds, he knows the ford, he knows what it is to have drunk, he knows the road, he is skilled in pastures, he does not milk dry, and he shows extra veneration to those bulls who are fathers and leaders of the herd. When a cowherd possesses these eleven factors, he is capable of keeping and rearing a herd of cattle.” - [MN 33.15]

“When, bhikkhus, a carpenter or a carpenter’s apprentice sees the impressions of his fingers and his thumb on the handle of his adze, he does not know: ‘I have worn away so much of the adze handle today, so much yesterday, so much earlier’; but when it has worn away, he knows that it has worn away. So too, when a bhikkhu is intent on development, even though he does not know: ‘I have worn away so much of the taints today, so much yesterday, so much earlier,’ yet when they are worn away, he knows that they are worn away.” - [AN 7.71]

One here who has failed to obtain
the fixed course of the good Dhamma,
will come to regret it for a long time
like a merchant who has missed a profit.
- [AN 8.29]

The Buddha’s first two lay disciples were Tapussa and Bhallika. They

were merchants.

These many similes show the respect that the Buddha had for business people like bankers and merchants and people who were skilled in crafts like goldsmithing, weaving, ivory carving, and so on. The Buddha encouraged hard work, learning skill in trade, and acquiring wealth through right livelihood. That is *right* livelihood. It is earning a living that is in harmony with the precepts:

> *"Monks, a lay follower should not engage in five types of business. Which five? Business in weapons, business in human beings, business in meat, business in intoxicants, and business in poison.*
>
> *"These are the five types of business that a lay follower should not engage in."*
>
> - [AN 5.177]

Now, as we fast forward in time to the present, lay people have to face these same challenges. How do we earn a living? How do we support our families and ourselves?

Many people think that economic activity is bad. Devoting yourself to a profession or career or trade or a skill has many benefits. And I think that the most important thing to understand is that the discipline that you get from working for many years at a job applies to your Dharma practice.

It takes time to master a complex skill, and meditation and the Dharma are certainly that. There are milestones of mastery at five years and ten years of learning a complex skill. In Buddhism, from the time of the Buddha, novice monks were expected to stay with their Dharma teachers and preceptors for five years. This correlates to the modern understanding. And it takes ten years for a monk to become a senior monk, a Bhante or an Ajahn. This also correlates to our modern understanding. So there is a close parallel between the amount of time

that a Buddhist monk or nun needs to master the Dharma, and the amount of time that it takes to master a trade. [Malcom Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success*]

All these activities fall under the general category of creative problem solving and work discipline. You may not think about meditation and Dharma study in that way, but it is. Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu says that you cannot put into a book all the things that can happen in a human mind. The book would be so enormous that it would be unusable [Ṭhānnisaro Bhikkhu, "Ingenuity", 11-Aug-2006]. You have a unique mind. Dharma teachers can head you in a certain direction, but ultimately there will be times when you have to use your own problem solving skills and your discipline to progress as a meditator.

For a layperson, then, someone who needs to support him/herself and also to progress in the Dharma, mastering a skill will support both of those activities. When you are younger you may need to devote more time to developing a career. But this is time well spent. This is the "discipline part" of the "Dharma and discipline":

> *And the Lord said to Ānanda: "Ānanda, it may be that you will think: 'The Teacher's instruction has ceased, now we have no teacher!' It should not be seen like this, Ānanda, for what I have taught and explained to you as Dhamma and discipline will, at my passing, be your teacher."* - [DN 16.6.1]

But it is not just young people who need to develop skill in work. Some people seem to know from the time they are very young what they want to do, what they are compelled to do. I always admired people like that, but I was not like that. I was in my late 20's before I found a career, and, frankly, I struggled for a long time. I tried many different things, and I was pretty bad at some of them. Robert Frost did not write a poem until he was 40. My mother started a new career at the age of 60 as a school psychologist. There is no fixed formula.

This is all part of your life's kōan. But I think that if you are a layperson, then you should not miss the opportunity to develop a career, whatever that is and whenever it happens. You do not have to be a rocket scientist. I have a dear friend who loves being a waitress. There are no bonus points for having a job that sounds good. It is better to be a skilled mother than a bad CEO, lawyer, or teacher.

I will make some final capping points on this topic. First of all, it should be clear by now that you should never use the Dharma as a way of earning a living. The Dharma professionals are monks and nuns. If you want to devote your life to the Dharma, then you should ordain. This does not mean that lay people cannot teach the Dharma. But it does mean that if you want to be a lay Dharma teacher, then you need a way to support yourself. You need a day job.

In medieval China, many lay Buddhists spent their lives working at a career, living by the Precepts, and managing their money in a responsible way. This let them retire early and devote their remaining years to practicing the Dharma. This is a very good model for modern, lay Buddhists.

6. Caring for Our Homes

> *Once when I'd just arrived in Bangkok on some visa business, I was in the midst of cleaning my room, sweeping it, wiping it down. A Western monk who'd just returned from Burma knew that I might be there, so he came around and sure enough I had just come in. But as soon as he saw me wiping down the floor, he said, "You Thai monks! All you do is spend your time cleaning up. Over in Burma, we have other people who do that for us." And as you looked at the quality of his meditation, you could see that he was used to having other people doing things for him. His meditation had gotten slack and sloppy as well.*
>
> - [Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, *Meditations 4*]

In my years as a software engineer, I was involved in a lot of hiring. One thing that I noticed over time is that the way someone does one thing is pretty much the way they do everything. If someone had a sloppy resume or a messy office, that was probably the kind of work they did. And in the course of the interview process, I tried to get the applicant to perform some task, even if that task did not appear to have anything to do with the job.

The purpose of this book is to take the practice off of the cushion and into our lives. This practice is about moment-to-moment awareness. It is about paying attention. It is about using wisdom and skill. By now you should know the drill. You can probably finish this paragraph. I don't need to tell you what the essence of this practice is. We are developing wholesome qualities of mind.

In order to bring the practice into your daily life, you must apply it to

everything. It is how you get up in the morning. It is how you make your bed. It is how you treat the checkout person at the grocery store:

> *At some point in the transformative process, you recognize that there's no difference between who you are in the pew or on the aikido mat, and who you are in the grocery store, on the freeway, or at your office. The same mindful attention brought to the placement of your legs in a difficult yoga pose can be brought to a challenging conversation with your child. The same peace and joy brought to a beloved community of fellow practitioners can be brought to a PTA meeting. The same reverence that arises from spending three days in the wilderness on a vision quest can be brought to the clouds in the sky and the spindly trees in the mall parking lot.*
>
> - [Marilyn Mandala Schlitz, Cassandra Vieten, Tina Amorok, *The Art and Science of Transformation in Everyday Life*]

This applies most certainly to your home. Your home may be a single room, a small apartment, or a large house with many rooms. When you are at a meditation retreat center, it is a small room. When you are hiking, it is your tent.

Wherever it is, this is a sacred space. If you have gone on a retreat or been to a temple or Dharma center, then you know that the custom is to leave your shoes at the door. This is an ancient Asian tradition. It probably comes from a time when shoes and sandals were pretty dirty things, so you took them off before coming indoors. It was a sign of reverence and respect.

I was at a meditation center once where a woman was complaining about this custom. She thought it was some quaint, archaic Asian holdover. But all I could think of was how it was first explained to me. "In Japan," I was told, "Taking your shoes off symbolizes leaving the dirt of the world

outside."

When we come home and take our shoes off and leave them at the door, it is a way of leaving behind whatever we just left. That might be our job or shopping or yard work. We take our shoes off and leave the dirt of the world outside. We enter our home as a sacred space. We come into the present moment, leaving behind whatever just happened. A home or a meditation hall is a sanctuary. It is a safe harbor.

Orthodox Jews have a custom that speaks to these same values. They affix a Mezuzah to the door, or just inside the doorway. A Mezuzah is a piece of parchment with sacred verses written on it. And when you come home you touch it as a sacred act.

Tibetan Buddhists have a similar tradition. They mount a prayer wheel to the door or just inside the door. When they come home they spin the wheel, thus "saying their prayers." These are all mindfulness practices. They bring us into the present moment. They put our lives back into perspective if we have forgotten what that is before we walked through the door.

Given that your home is a sacred space, it is worth treating it as such. We keep it neat and clean. The beds are made. The dishes are done. The floors are clean. The bills are paid. We treat people to whom we owe money as if the money were owed to us. This is being responsible and mindful and kind and courteous.

Caring for our homes and what is in them is a sacred act. Everything that we have came with a cost. Something on our planet was disrupted. That is what makes what we have sacred. It is not because any of these things have inherent value or meaning. They don't. But what we have was taken from somewhere. It probably disturbed some animal's habitat. There is nothing terrible about that. Life feeds on life. That is how the system works. But if we take more than we need, and then do not care for what we have taken, then we just create more and more disruption. We honor our planet and its inhabitants by treating what we have with

care and respect.

7. Taking Care of Our Bodies

What applies to our homes also applies to our bodies. On one hand, we do not want to self-identify with our bodies. The body is the body, as the Buddha said, in and of itself. It is not "me." It is just the body.

On the other hand, the body is where we live during this lifetime. Our minds and bodies are interdependent. A healthy body enables us to practice the Dharma. It enables us to work and go through the normal activities of life.

Elsewhere I relay this story about the proper way to think about the body. It is akin to the way a cavalryman relates to his horse. A cavalryman is completely dependent on his horse for his very life. So he cares for the horse. He feeds it and waters it and brushes it and exercises it. He has a very unique relationship with his horse. But he never thinks of the horse as "my self."

Some people are born with vibrant, healthy bodies. Some people are born with bodies that are not as healthy. Their bodies may even fail them in some way. Whatever your situation, that is, as the saying goes, the hand that you are dealt. Now it is up to you to play that hand as best you can.

Some years ago I did Tai Chi, and the instructor told us once that having a naturally healthy body was considered something of a liability in Tai Chi. "Naturally athletic people," he said, "tend to take their bodies for granted." You see this in athletes, who by the time they are in their 40's and 50's, have all sorts of problems like arthritis and heart conditions and so forth because they thought they were indestructible.

I have also seen cases where people who have been strong and healthy their whole lives develop a medical condition. It might be something

serious like cancer. And they seem to have a much more difficult time dealing with the fact that they are sick and dying than people who have had to struggle with their health their whole lives.

If you are naturally strong and athletic that is wonderful. Good for you. And if you handle that properly you may have an advantage in doing intensive Dharma practice or simply doing things with your life that not everyone can do. I am not trying to condemn good health. This is more making a point about working with what you have, and if your health is not so great that is not necessarily a disadvantage. The question is what do you do with that?

I love this story, and I have not had a chance to tell it anywhere else, so this seems like a good place for it. This is actually from the Taoist tradition. It is called "Maybe."

> *There was an old farmer who had worked his crops for many years. One day his horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, his neighbors came to visit. "Such bad luck," they said sympathetically.*
>
> *"Maybe," the farmer replied. The next morning the horse returned, bringing with it three other wild horses. "How wonderful," the neighbors exclaimed.*
>
> *"Maybe," replied the old man. The following day, his son tried to ride one of the untamed horses, was thrown, and broke his leg. The neighbors again came to offer their sympathy on his misfortune.*
>
> *"Maybe," answered the farmer.*
>
> *The day after, military officials came to the village to draft young men into the army. Seeing that the son's leg was broken, they passed him by. The neighbors*

congratulated the farmer on how well things had turned out.

"Maybe," said the farmer.

If you are young and athletic and healthy, take good care of your body. If you are old and sick and dying, take good care of your body. Whatever your situation is, take care of your body. Just do not become attached to it. The body will fail. There will be a time to let go of it.

Buddhism is in a sense naturally conservative, at least when it comes to daily living, and the body is a good example of that. You want to take care of your body in the same way that you care for your home. In the Vinaya there are rules about keeping the body clean. Monastics, of course, shave their heads. You do not have to do that, but you should keep your hair properly cut. Your clothing should be simple and conservative.

My brother-in-law used to spend a lot of time in Afghanistan. When he was there, he would stay in Kabul with a relatively wealthy family. When the women in the family were in the family compound, they dressed however they pleased. However, when they went outside, in public, they wore burkas.

This was not just because it was the custom. These Muslim women thought it curious that Western women wanted to advertise their bodies in such a public and suggestive way. And in Afghanistan the understanding was that women wearing burkas was a form of protection that went back to the time of Genghis Khan. When the Mongols invaded Muslim countries, there was a lot of rape, so the women started wearing burkas to hide whatever physical attributes they had. Since it was hard to tell which women were attractive and which ones were not, the burka acted as something of a deterrent.

How much clothing you have is another issue. I know that this is an easier issue for men than women. I more or less follow the monastic rule,

which is to have three changes of clothes. In the winter, for example, I wear sweatshirts. I have three of them. I have three pairs of dungarees, and so on. Of course, I do not work in an office so I can do that.

But even for women there is a way to dress that is simple, professional, and stylish. My sister once had a job where she traveled almost everywhere in the world, and she could go anyplace for any length of time with two carry-on bags. She had a system of combining blouses and skirts and pants and so on.

Buddhists traditionally do not overdo "adornments," jewelry and such. On Uposatha days people do not wear adornments to the temple. They also do not use perfume. Perfume can be a real problem in temples and Dharma halls because many people are allergic to it.

I am sure that some of you will resist these types of lifestyle choices, and that is fine. Wearing jewelry and using perfume does not make you a bad person. But over time perhaps you can question why you need to bring such attention to yourself. If you do wear jewelry keep it simple. My daughter is a lovely young woman, and I like buying jewelry for her, especially since in the southwest where I live, there are so many wonderful Native American artisans. But her tastes are simple and elegant. I think that is keeping in the spirit of Buddhist simplicity.

8. Taking Care of Our Minds

Our mind is like a television set with thousands of channels, and the channel we switch on is the channel we are at that moment. When we turn on anger, we are anger. When we turn on peace and joy, we are peace and joy. We have the ability to select the channel. We are what we choose to be. We can select any channel of the mind. Buddha (awakened mind) is a channel, Māra (confusion, compulsion, and delusion) is a channel, remembering is a channel, forgetting is a channel, calm is a channel, agitation is a channel. Changing from one state of being to another is as simple as the change from a channel showing a film to a channel playing music.

There are people who cannot tolerate peace and quiet, who are afraid of facing themselves, so they turn on the television in order to be preoccupied with it for a whole evening. In contemporary culture, people rarely like to be with themselves, and they frequently seek forgetfulness - downtown at the theater or other places of amusement. People rarely like to look deeply and compassionately at themselves.

Young people in American watch television more than five hours per day, and they also have all sorts of electronic games to occupy them. Where will a culture in which people do not have the chance to face themselves or form real relationships with others lead us?

There are many interesting, instructive programs on television, and we can use the TV guide to select programs which encourage mindfulness. We should decide to watch only the programs we have selected and avoid becoming a victim of the television.

- [Thich Nhat Hanh, "Turning On The Television: Where Is Your Mind?"]

When we take care of our bodies, we want to put good things into it and avoid putting poison into it. The same is true for the mind.

Many years ago – and this was before the Internet – my teacher suggested that I avoid watching the news for a year. That was a very instructive practice. First of all, it sensitized me to how much agitation is caused by watching the news. Second, I found that even without watching or listening to the news, I always somehow knew what was going on. This shows how pervasive the news is in our culture.

This practice is to pay attention to what comes in through the sense doors and see what effect that has on the mind. This is especially true for television, radio, the Internet, movies, etc.

Certain forms of entertainment are particularly toxic. The news is one. Violent television programs and movies are another. Loud, aggressive music is as well. And commercials are particularly agitating. Sometimes even when the television program itself is not objectionable, the bombardment of the mind by advertising is.

We are so used to having the media invade our lives that we do not have any idea how much it affects us. I knew a family once that as soon as they woke up in the morning, they turned on the television. And the last thing they did before going to bed at night was to turn it off. They didn't even realize what that was doing to the environment in their household. But for someone who walked into the house and then left, it was abundantly apparent.

This causes a sort of sensory media addiction. I went to an opera recently where a young woman in front of me started texting halfway through the second act. You may have had this happen to you at the movies. People can't even go a couple of hours without looking at their cell phones.

We have even learned to rationalize this addictive behavior. People call it "multitasking," as if that is a good thing. I have even had young people say that their generation is better at multitasking than older people.

Well, first of all, the human brain does not evolve in 20 years. It takes thousands and thousands of years, so the brain of a 60-year-old and the brain of a 20-year-old are not biologically different.

There is also a basic misunderstanding of what multitasking means. People who use this word are, in fact, correct that this describes what the brain is doing. But that is not what they mean. What they think they are describing is "multiprocessing." Multiprocessing is when more than one thing is going on at the same time. There are computers that do this. They have more than one processor, and tasks can be divided up and assigned to different processors.

A simple example is copying a file. One processor can read the input file while another writes the output file. They have to be synchronized, of course, but basically two sets of operations are going on simultaneously.

This is not, however, how the human brain works. The human brain can only do one thing at a time. This is the correct meaning of "multitasking." One task executes, and then it is interrupted by another task. In order for the second task to execute, the state of the first task must be stored, the context is switched to the state of the second task, and then the second task executes. There is an inherent inefficiency in this operation. Nothing of value happens during the task switch.

So when the human brain multitasks, it is just doing one thing at a time, and it has to pause to change tasks. This is extremely agitating to the mind.

Our cultivation of concentration is the opposite of this. We try to get the mind to stay on task. That task is usually watching the breath. Watching the breath helps to calm the mind and to get it into a state of calm, tranquility, serenity, and stillness. It is a state of peace and happiness. People who are jumping back and forth between watching a movie, texting, and surfing the Internet are not going to experience this kind of joy and happiness. And they are very likely to become angry and reactive and insensitive to their actions. And you certainly would not want someone doing brain surgery on you who is surfing the Internet and texting.

There are a lot of lingering effects to this media bombardment. I went on a meditation retreat once where after three or four days the teacher asked how many people had a song running through their heads. About half the people raised their hands. So even after several days of complete silence the mind was not cleansed of this media noise.

It does not have to be all bad. Some movies and TV programs are soothing and inspirational. This is not about unilaterally condemning all media. But it is about becoming sensitive to how it affects our minds. When you get an email and see that it is about politics or something like that, what is the upside to even reading it? It is worth asking the question.

Monks and nuns are forbidden from watching any form of entertainment. A friend of mine told me a story about being in Thailand with a group of monks, and there was a festival going on in the village. She said it was actually kind of charming to see the lengths to which they went to avoid it. So that is the extreme case.

As lay people, we are probably not going to avoid entertainment of any kind. But start by seeing how dependent our minds are for this kind of stimulation. See how much agitation it causes. You may even notice how the last thing you see on TV at night stays with you all night and into your morning meditation. Can you simply turn off the radio or TV? Can you drive without having the radio on? When you watch the news is

there even any value in that? What is the benefit? Does it make you a happier more skillful and contented person, or is it just noise? Can you go even a day without being on the Internet or watching television?

9. Eating

> *"Bhikkhus, you should train thus:*
>
> *"We will be moderate in eating. Reflecting wisely, we will take food neither for amusement nor for intoxication nor for the sake of physical beauty and attractiveness, but only for the endurance and continuance of this body, for ending discomfort, and for assisting the holy life, considering: 'Thus I shall terminate old feelings without arousing new feelings and I shall be healthy and blameless and shall live in comfort.'"* - [MN 39.9]

Perhaps the most widespread addiction in this country is food. This addiction leads to obesity, diabetes, joint problems, and so on. I am sure you know all about this, so I am not going to make a big case here for the problems associated with over-eating.

One of the things that we want to cultivate in our Buddhist practice is a responsible relationship to food. We need to eat, of course. Eating properly can lead to good health, and that good health can help us practice the Dharma. Eating a healthy diet and exercising and caring for our bodies can help us to live longer, more productive lives.

On the other hand, food is probably the most obvious way in which we can see how craving creates suffering. If we eat something we don't like, we suffer. If we cannot get what we want to eat, we suffer. Then we eat something we like but we eat too much, and we suffer.

If, however, we are happy with whatever we have, then we do not suffer. We can eat something we like and simply enjoy it. If we eat something we do not like, we can still be grateful for what we have, appreciating that we do not have to go hungry. We can even fast and be satisfied with

that. In all these cases there is no stress, and there is no suffering.

What We Eat

> *Today, 150 billion land animals and 1.5 trillion sea animals are killed for our consumption. We treat them like rats and vermin and cockroaches to be eliminated. This would be called genocide or dehumanization if they were human beings.*
>
> *We even go one step further with animals: we instrumentalize them. They become objects. They become the pig industry, sausage or meat factories. Ethically you cannot imagine progressing toward a more altruistic or more compassionate society while behaving like this.*
>
> *Eating meat reveals another selfishness in terms of other fellow human beings. Rich countries consume the most meat: about 200 kilos per year per inhabitant in the USA, compared to about 3 kilos in India. The more the GDP of a country increases, usually so does the amount of meat consumption.*
>
> *In order to produce one kilo of meat, you need ten kilos of vegetable proteins. This is at a cost to the poorest section of humanity. With two acres of land, you can feed fifty vegetarians or two meat eaters. The 775 million tons of soy and corn that are used for industrial farming could be used for feeding people who are in need.*
>
> - [Matthieu Ricard, "Why I am a Vegetarian"]

As with everything else that we own, there is a cost associated with what

we eat. The environmental cost of eating meat is enormous, and as countries like China and India become more prosperous the planet cannot sustain this level of consumption.

There are three main arguments for becoming a vegetarian:

1. It is usually healthier.
2. It uses fewer of the planet's resources.
3. It reduces the number of animals that are raised in often brutal conditions and then mercilessly killed.

All living things want to live. When I lived in Vermont, one of my favorite hikes was up a mountain called Camel's Hump. The summit of Camel's Hump is arctic tundra, and I was always amazed at the scrawny little trees that insisted on growing there.

As to health, there are people who need meat in their diets. The Dalai Lama happens to be one of them. That is a case where meat is more of a medicine than food. That is a somewhat different case.

You will hear that vegetarian diets do not provide enough protein, but that is a myth. In fact, doctors consider vegetable sources of protein superior to meat:

> *Proteins can come from multiple sources. Typically people think of red meats, dairy and eggs. However animal proteins are also high in cholesterol and have been shown to increase risks of cancer with increasing consumption.*
>
> *High cholesterol has been linked to heart disease and stroke which are two of the biggest killers in America. Soy protein is also a high-quality source of protein that lacks the risks associated with animal proteins. Other sources of plantar proteins include beans, brown rice and nuts.*

> *Most plant proteins lack one of the essential amino acids, but when eating a balanced diet of multiple proteins sources individuals can obtain all of the essential amino acids that they need.*
>
> - [Christopher Burton, "Protein Requirements for Athletes", Lessons from Physiatry]

(Physiatry is the field of medicine that deals with healing.)

I became a vegetarian almost by accident. My health was very poor at the time, and among other things my cholesterol was quite high. I had had chest pain for a couple of years. I was only 39 years old but I knew that I was headed for a heart attack. So I changed my diet and I started running. One of the things that I changed in my diet was to drastically reduce how much meat that I ate.

Within six months I found that I had lost my taste for meat. Meats like beef and bacon are grotesquely greasy and fatty. They no longer had any appeal to me. In fact, the mere thought of bacon, which has been turned into a sort of food opioid, makes me feel slightly nauseated. Once I was mistakenly given pork fried rice and the pork tasted like salted cardboard to me. On another occasion I mistakenly ate some chicken, and that did not taste like it had any flavor at all.

I had a similar experience with sugar. I used to love cake and ice cream. But I have dental problems, and I found out that by cutting sugar out of my diet, my teeth and gums improved. But I also discovered that I lost my taste for sugar. When I ate cake and ice cream, they did not taste good to me any more.

These experiences made me wonder whether we even really taste our food. Our conditions and habits may be so ingrained that we think we taste one thing, and all that is happening is that our brains are manufacturing the experience. Accomplished meditators know how the brain takes a sensory input and fabricates a mental formation from that.

When you can break those experiences down, they often take on a different form. Working with pain is like that, where you start looking deeply into the complex process of feelings that the mind turns into "pain." There is a lot going on there and not all of it is unpleasant.

A few years ago a friend of mine told me that she was worried about her husband's diet. She was trying to get him to try some of the soy meat substitutes. He aggressively resisted that idea, saying that he had never eaten anything made from soy that "did not make him want to vomit."

I suggested a particular brand of soy breakfast sausage, and she made it for him without telling him what it was. He uncharacteristically went out of his way to tell her how much he liked it!

I had another similar experience with someone who I told about how good lentils are for you. He went on a rampage about how much he hates lentils. Now in India, they hardly ever eat a meal without lentils, and the Indians are really expert at turning lentils into wonderful dishes. The most popular form is called "dal." They hardly ever have a meal without it. Every section of India and every family has its own recipe. I am pretty sure that if I served him dal, he would enjoy it. He probably would not even know it was made from lentils. In India they also make a wonderful, paper-thin crepe called a "dosa." It, too, is made from lentils, although you would never know that from eating it.

Do the planet and yourself and the animals a favor, and if you are not a vegetarian now, try and start working yourself in that direction. And pay attention to how the mind responds to food. What you think you are experiencing and what you are actually experiencing are often very different things.

How We Eat

I know a number of self-described foodies. They can talk for hours and hours and hours about food. And one thing that I noticed about all of them is how unmindfully they eat. They shovel the food in their mouths

at such a prodigious rate that I cannot believe that their taste buds get anything but a passing acquaintance with what is flying by them.

I would think that if you enjoy something, then you would not be in such a hurry to end the experience. If you are enjoying a nice hot bath, you would not leap out of the tub. But that seems to be how many people eat.

This does not mean that you cannot enjoy a nice meal. In fact, if you eat mindfully you will really enjoy it, and not in some contrived way. It won't be an experience that your mind manufactures. You will enjoy eating more, not less.

Diet programs often teach habits that are conducive to mindful eating. If you put a spoonful of food into your mouth and then put the spoon down while you chew, that is good mindfulness practice. Then you pick up the spoon when you are done chewing, and repeat as necessary. You will eat less, and I think that you will enjoy it more.

How Much We Eat

When my children were young they had a friend who spent a year in Brazil. When she came back to the United States, her first observation was how much people eat here. Americans eat an enormous amount of food, and most of it is bad for them.

This is not surprising. The next time that you watch television, note how many commercials are for food. And it is not good food. It isn't broccoli, whole wheat bread, and brown rice. It's junk. It is hamburgers and Twinkies. And we get these messages drummed into our heads every hour that we have the TV on.

Imagine if your local heroin dealer was doing that. That is basically what it is. It is advertising that is telling us to put poison into our bodies.

I knew a Buddhist monk once who had reached the 10-year anniversary of his full ordination monk, and as a gift to him he was given a month's

retreat. So he was trying to decide how he was going to run his self-retreat, what the rules would be. Two of his rules were very simple: 1) when you are done sleeping get up, and 2) when you have had enough food stop eating.

That sounds so simple, but I started working with those two rules, and it is interesting how often I found that I had eaten enough but wanted to keep eating. Once the desire for food kicks in, it does not stop just because you have eaten enough. The craving for food continues. You still want more.

This is a wonderful way to practice. Just as we work with feelings on the cushion, now we can see feelings at work in the eating process. There is a feeling of pleasure, and this gives rise to craving. By watching what the mind does with this, we can stop the craving and stop eating at a more appropriate point.

Larry Rosenberg says that in yoga they teach you to eat until your stomach is 2/3 full. Then stop. You have eaten enough. That is another good mindfulness practice. Before he told me this, I never had any idea how full my stomach was. The stomach is a muscle, and because it is a muscle, you can make it stretch. This is one way that our bodies make it possible to over-eat. This is probably a survival mechanism from times when food sources were unreliable. But now it is making us fat and unhealthy.

Over-eating is another example of how we abuse our use of resources. Not only do we eat the wrong things, incurring the environmental cost that comes with that, we make it worse by eating too much.

The Buddha talked often about a proper relationship to food. I tell an abbreviated version of this story in *The Little Book of the Life of the Buddha*. It happens between the Buddha and King Pasenadi:

> *At Sāvatthī. Now on that occasion King Pasenadi of Kosala had eaten a bucket measure of rice and curries. Then,*

while still full, huffing and puffing, the king approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side.

Then the Blessed One, having understood that King Pasenadi was full and was huffing and puffing, on that occasion recited this verse:

“When a man is always mindful,
Knowing moderation in the food he eats,
His ailments then diminish:
He ages slowly, guarding his life.”

Now on that occasion the brahmin youth Sudassana was standing behind King Pasenadi of Kosala. The king then addressed him thus: “Come now, dear Sudassana, learn this verse from the Blessed One and recite it to me whenever I am taking my meal. I will then present you daily with a hundred kahāpaṇas as a perpetual grant.”

“Yes, sire,” the brahmin youth Sudassana replied. Having learned this verse from the Blessed One, whenever King Pasenadi was taking his meal the brahmin youth Sudassana recited:

“When a man is always mindful,
Knowing moderation in the food he eats,
His ailments then diminish:
He ages slowly, guarding his life.”

Then King Pasenadi of Kosala gradually reduced his intake of food to at most a pint-pot measure of boiled rice. At a later time, when his body had become quite slim, King Pasenadi of Kosala stroked his limbs with his

> *hand and on that occasion uttered this inspired utterance: "The Blessed One showed compassion towards me in regard to both kinds of good — the good pertaining to the present life and that pertaining to the future life." -* [SN 3.13]

Even in the fifth century BCE, the Buddha had a good weight-loss program.

Fasting

In Thich Nhat Hanh's saṇgha they practice fasting. This can be a very useful way to learn about your relationship to food.

Throughout most of human history people did not eat regularly scheduled meals. They might not eat every day. As a result, our bodies evolved to handle periods of eating and periods of non-eating. One reason that we have an obesity problem today is that our bodies are very good at storing fat. Our bodies can even take non-fat and turn it into fat.

All animals fast in times of stress and illness. You may have been very sick at some time and lost your appetite. This is a natural way for the body to rest and conserve energy. Processing food in your body uses a lot of energy, which is why you often feel so tired after eating.

> *There's a tendency for us to think that our happiness should be searched for in the future, by doing something. Even our health should be "searched for" by doing something. But we don't know that not doing anything may be the key to restoring our health. Many of us are obsessed by the idea that we have to get more nutrients. We buy vitamins, "one-a-day," and we take one pill every morning and things like that. Many of us are motivated by that kind of desire. Not many of us are aware that we have a reserve in our body that we can use for up to*

three or four weeks without eating. Those of us who practice fasting and drinking only water, can go for many weeks and we don't have to stop the daily things. We can still go to sitting meditation, walking meditation, cleaning in the kitchen, in the bathroom, participating in Dharma talks. We can do that many weeks without eating. In the process, we enjoy doing these things. And the toxins we have, from the third day on, begin to get out because we are drinking a lot of water, we are practicing a lot of walking meditation and deep breathing and we clean our bodies, so the toxins can get out. And after three weeks, you look much better — even if you don't eat anything. Your skin, the expression on your face, your smile — you may look like a new person. That is not because you take a lot of vitamins, or eat a lot of nutrients, it is because you don't eat anything. You allow your body to rest.

- [Thich Nhat Hanh, "Dharma Talk at Plum Village", 4-Aug-2013]

In the monastic Saṇgha, fasting sometimes happens naturally because monks and nuns cannot always get alms-food. They treat a day without food as just a normal part of life. In the Buddha's discourses, when the Buddha meets monks on the road, he will often ask them if they are able to get sufficient alms-food:

Then all three went to meet the Blessed One. One took his bowl and outer robe, one prepared a seat, and one set out water for washing the feet. The Blessed One sat down on the seat made ready and washed his feet. Then those three venerable ones paid homage to the Blessed One and sat down at one side. When they were seated, the Blessed One said to them: "I hope you are all keeping well, Anuruddha, I hope you are all comfortable, I hope

you are not having any trouble getting alms-food."

"We are keeping well, Blessed One, we are comfortable, and we are not having any trouble getting alms-food." - [MN 31.5]

We have preconceived ideas about so many things, and eating is one of them. When I was growing up I had it drilled into my head that you had to eat three times a day. But even before I became a Buddhist, I discovered that my body works best when I eat one main meal per day and then have one or two light meals – almost more like snacks – per day.

I also discovered that meditating after I eat a large meal just makes me sleepy. Lama Surya Das calls the meditation sessions that happen right after lunch the "siesta sessions." This is another way to learn about our relationship to food. Notice what your energy levels are after eating. If you feel sluggish you have eaten too much.

Fasting can be very helpful if you begin to feel sick. You have probably had this happen. You are not yet sick yet, but you can feel an illness coming on. If you stop eating immediately, you have a very good chance of not getting sick. You will probably feel a little queasy for a day, and then you will be fine.

Another thing you can learn when you fast is that it is not that big of a deal. In fact, if you stay busy during the day, you may forget that you have not eaten. The first day is usually the hardest. On the first day of a fast, drinking green tea can help. Green tea is an appetite suppressant.

By the second or third day, you may find that it is actually hard to start eating again. And when you do start to eat again remember that your body will be in a delicate state, especially your stomach. Eat things that are easy on your digestive system when you break a fast.

Obviously if you have a health condition you must approach this practice

with care. But fasting can help us lose our preconceived notions about eating, about what we think we need.

When you are addicted to something, in order to stop the addiction, you must convince yourself that you don't want or need it. Fasting can help us do that with food.

10. Consumption

> *“Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu lives in some jungle thicket. While he is living there his unestablished mindfulness becomes established, his unconcentrated mind becomes concentrated, his undestroyed taints come to destruction, he attains the unattained supreme security from bondage; and also the requisites of life that should be obtained by one gone forth — robes, alms-food, resting place, and medicinal requisites — are easy to come by. The bhikkhu should consider thus: ‘I am living in this jungle thicket. While I am living here my unestablished mindfulness has become established... I have attained the unattained supreme security from bondage; and also the requisites of life… are easy to come by.’ That bhikkhu should continue living in that jungle thicket as long as life lasts; he should not depart.”* - [MN 17.6]

The issue of consumption has come up a number of times by inference but I want to address it directly.

Americans make up 5% of the world’s population but consume 24% of its resources. And as the American lifestyle gets exported to growing economies like China and India, the planet cannot sustain this level of consumption.

Even 2400 years ago the Buddha was sensitive to what we take from the environment. Monastics were only allowed the barest minimum of possessions: three robes, an alms bowl, a waistband, a razor, a sewing kit, and a water strainer. These days they commonly have other items like a toothbrush, toothpaste, clock, and so forth, but the list is still quite Spartan. If you go on a meditation retreat, you will get a taste of the simplicity of the life of a monk or nun.

There is something quite liberating about such a simple life. There is very little to take care of, to fix, maintain, keep clean, and so on. I heard a story once about a forest monk. Forest monks live a particularly simple life. He visited a monk in Sri Lanka who lived in one of the big monasteries there. At one point the forest monk said to the monastery monk, "Why don't you come spend some time with me at my monastery." The monastery monk agreed, and he started heading back to his monastery to gather his things. Meanwhile the forest monk started heading down the road. "Where are you going?!" yelled the monastery monk. It turned out that since the forest monk carried everything he owned with him, if he wanted to go somewhere he simply went, whereas the monastery monk had all kinds of possessions, so he had to go pack.

I am guessing that for most lay people life is not this simple. Somewhere between the lifestyle of a forest monk and the lifestyle of the super-rich there is a happy meeting point.

As with eating, no one can tell you what that is. You will have to work on that as an ongoing project. But one thing to consider is this. It has become common to believe that we can continue to consume as much as we do, but replace what we consume with more environmentally responsible – green – products. And I think that is a myth and a rationalization.

First of all, we hardly ever know the environmental cost of something we buy. Take something simple like laundry detergent. I always buy the environmentally friendly, biodegradable laundry detergent. That is partly because I have a septic system. But I do not know how large a carbon footprint the manufacturing of that detergent makes. Because it is shipped from far away, it may even have a larger carbon footprint than the cheaper, non-biodegradable detergent.

There are some other interesting cases. I talked to a mechanical engineer once who said that the carbon footprint of manufacturing and shipping solar panels is actually greater than more traditional forms of producing electricity. I do not know if that is true, but it is worth considering. Of course, solar power is renewable, sort of, but even solar panels wear out

and have to be replaced.

These are complicated issues, and there has only been a limited amount of analysis and study on them. This is all the more reason to concentrate on how much we consume, not just to think that we can continue our high rates of consumption but use green products instead.

A great deal of what we consume comes from our habitual patterns, our impulses, compulsions, and our need to feed. Reducing our consumption is a mindfulness practice. How much do we really need? Everyone needs to answer that question for him/herself. But the opposite of mindfulness is mindlessness. We must train ourselves to consume carefully, responsibly, and mindfully.

Monks and nuns have very simple requisites. They have only what is necessary for a minimal material existence. For lay people this is not as easy. We each have to determine what the bare, essential requisites are for us. It is part of our life's kōan.

11. Sex

> *"Again, with sensual pleasures as the cause, sensual pleasures as the source, sensual pleasures as the basis, the cause being simply sensual pleasures, kings quarrel with kings, nobles with nobles, brahmins with brahmins, householders with householders; mother quarrels with son, son with mother, father with son, son with father; brother quarrels with brother, brother with sister, sister with brother, friend with friend. And here in their quarrels, brawls, and disputes they attack each other with fists, clods, sticks, or knives, whereby they incur death or deadly suffering. Now this too is a danger in the case of sensual pleasures, a mass of suffering here and now… the cause being simply sensual pleasures."* - [MN 13.11]

(The Pāli word for "sensual" is the same word that is used for "sexual.")

The Second Noble Truth says that the cause of our dukkha – our suffering and stress – is craving, and there is no stronger force for craving than sexual desire.

Pick up one of the tabloid newspapers sometime and look at the violence that surrounds sexual desire. Mothers kill their children to please a boyfriend. Men kill their women lovers and women kill their male lovers. Men kill their male lovers and women kill their women lovers. People kill from jealousy. People kill from the pain of broken relationships. Then there is the violence of sexual assault.

Even people who do not commit these obvious acts of violence have often been terribly hurt by an unhappy romance. Most people have had that experience.

Sexual desire is so potent that even people who have attained stream-entry are not rid of it. In fact, it is not until the second-to-last stage of awakening - non-returning - that we are finally free from sexual desire. So clearly this powerful form of desire must be treated with care and respect.

Monks and nuns are celibate. That is one way to deal with sexual desire, to avoid it entirely. That, by the way, is not to say that no monk or nun has ever had sex. The Vinaya is full of stories of monks and nuns who found ways to skirt the rules. There is even a story about a monk who lived with a female monkey and had sex with her. There is a great deal of attention paid to sex in the Vinaya, which is pretty curious considering that the rule about sex is "don't do it." That would seem pretty clear. So even for monastics the issue of sexual desire is a serious problem.

Lay people can, of course, also choose celibacy. This usually gets easier as you get older. If your practice gets deep enough, your sexual desire will diminish as well. It may even begin to feel somewhat grotesque. You might consider this choice. It can be a little hard sometimes to explain this choice to others because most people think sex is a necessity. Of course it is not, but that is the general view.

I saw a comedian once who was talking about drugs like Viagra. He said that as he got older he was actually looking forward to being free from "all that pressure." Drugs like Viagra are not a solution so much as they are a perpetuation of a problem. It is an interesting case of inventing a disease and then creating a profitable solution to the disease. From the standpoint of the Second Noble Truth it is quite unskillful.

So celibacy is one approach, and I put it out there because very few people consider this to be a possible choice. But it is a good option, and it can save you from all kinds of grief.

Being celibate, however, does not free you from the problems that come with sexual desire. You will not be free from sexual desire, so you will still have to deal with that. There is also, however, the almost thornier

problem of the appearance of sexual impropriety.

There are a lot of rules in the Vinaya that have to deal with this issue. And living in the age of social media men and women – particularly men – have to deal with the appearance of impropriety. In the Vinaya monks are not even allowed to be in the company of a woman unless they are with at least one other monk. So even in 400 BCE the Buddha was concerned with how things looked. Lay people were very quick to criticize the monks (it was mainly monks) for anything that looked inappropriate. Now that we have so many ways to broadcast rumor and innuendo, this problem is much worse. Some people may spread lies simply out of meanness.

So one issue is your choice about sex, and the second issue is being careful about the appearance of impropriety. Both of these issues are harder for lay people than monks and nuns because I think that most people give monastics the benefit of the doubt. And I can tell you from painful personal experience that it is quite the opposite for lay people. People are quick to assume the worst.

I do not have any simple answers to either of these issues. But I mention the Vinaya rules as one possible guide. If you choose to be celibate or not, be aware that being alone with someone who might be viewed as a lover could cause you a great deal of harm. At least try to be sensitive to that fact and avoid any obvious appearances of impropriety. For men, in particular, it is helpful if you avoid being alone with a woman if that could be taken the wrong way.

Most people will not, of course, choose celibacy. At the Zen Mountain Monastery they have this rule: you may have one committed, monogamous relationship. I think that is a very wise rule. Also note that the Buddha never specified heterosexuality. He only put down a rule about abstaining from sexual misconduct, sexual conduct that can cause harm to yourself or others. He also never said that you have to be married.

The Buddha offers this advice to people in "one, committed monogamous relationship":

> *"There are five ways in which a husband should minister to his wife as the western direction: by honoring her, by not disparaging her, by not being unfaithful to her, by giving authority to her, by providing her with adornments. And there are five ways in which a wife, thus ministered to by her husband as the western direction, will reciprocate: by properly organizing her work, by being kind to the servants, by not being unfaithful, by protecting stores, and by being skillful and diligent in all she has to do. In this way the western direction is covered, making it at peace and free from fear."* - [DN 31.30]

Venerable K. Sri Dhammananda has these comments about the Buddha's instructions:

> *Knowing the psychology of the man who tends to consider himself superior, the Buddha made a remarkable change and uplifted the status of a woman by a simple suggestion that a husband should honor and respect his wife. A husband should be faithful to his wife, which means that a husband should fulfill and maintain his marital obligations to his wife thus sustaining the confidence in the marital relationship in every sense of the word. The husband, being a bread-winner, would invariably stay away from home, hence he should entrust the domestic or household duties to the wife who should be considered as the keeper and the distributor of the property and the home economic-administrator. The provision of befitting ornaments to the wife should be symbolic of the husband's love, care and attention*

showered on the wife. This symbolic practice has been carried out from time immemorial in Buddhist communities. Unfortunately it is in danger of dying out because of the influence of modern civilization.

- [Venerable K. Sri Dhammananda, "A Happy Married Life: A Buddhist Perspective"]

(Venerable Dhammananda is from Burma, thus the comments about modern civilization.)

As to the responsibilities of a wife, Venerable Dhammananda makes these comments:

In advising women about their role in married life, the Buddha appreciated that the peace and harmony of a home rested largely on a woman. His advice was realistic and practical when he explained a good number of day-to-day characteristics which a woman should or should not cultivate. On diverse occasions, the Buddha counseled that a wife should:

a. *not harbor evil thoughts against her husband;*
b. *not be cruel, harsh or domineering;*
c. *not be spendthrift but should be economical and live within her means;*
d. *guard and save her husband's hard-earned earnings and property;*
e. *always be attentive and chaste in mind and action;*
f. *be faithful and harbor no thought of any adulterous acts;*
g. *be refined in speech and polite in action;*
h. *be kind, industrious and hardworking;*
i. *be thoughtful and compassionate towards her*

husband, and her attitude should equate that of a mother's love and concern for the protection of her only son;

j. *be modest and respectful;*
k. *be cool, calm and understanding — serving not only as a wife but also as a friend and advisor when the need arises.*

- [Venerable K. Sri Dhammananda, "A Happy Married Life: A Buddhist Perspective"]

You have to do a little modern translation on some of these criteria, but for the most part I think you can see that they are practical. In our romantic relationships, we tend to focus on what we want. This is craving. The Buddha focused on what our responsibilities are, on what we can give and what we should do. This is generosity.

The rule about sex as stated in the Five Precepts is more general and flexible than either celibacy or committing to one relationship. The rule is to act in a sexually responsible way, and not to use your sexual energy in a way that harms you or anyone else. So that is the rule. But be careful about using the flexibility in the rule to justify giving in to dubious sexual desires.

The Buddha warned us over and over to be wary of the dangers in sensual pleasures:

> *"Again, with sensual pleasures as the cause, sensual pleasures as the source, sensual pleasures as the basis, the cause being simply sensual pleasures, people indulge in misconduct of body, speech, and mind. Having done so, on the dissolution of the body, after death, they reappear in states of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, even in hell. Now this is a danger in the case of sensual pleasures, a mass of*

suffering in the life to come, having sensual pleasures as its cause, sensual pleasures as its source, sensual pleasures as its basis, the cause being simply sensual pleasures." - [MN 13.15]

Having said that and given proper warning, it is certainly possible to create a sexually responsible situation in which there is no harm. I once saw an interview with a Swedish woman. She was the CEO of her own company, and she had no interest in a committed, monogamous relationship. She had no desire for children. But she did not want to be celibate. So she found a male escort.

The story also included an interview with the escort. As far as I could tell he was a decent, responsible person. He cared about his clients. Like any good businessperson he cared about them beyond the physical relationship. He worried about them and he tried to take care of them.

I think that type of relationship is more difficult if the gender roles are reversed. The dynamics are more complicated, and women are so often used and abused. However it is possible, and I have seen interviews with female escorts who seemed at ease with their choices in life.

These, of course, are extreme examples. I am simply pointing out that there is a range of possibilities that satisfy the precept. But be very careful about rationalizations.

In summary:

1. You may choose celibacy.
2. If you do not choose celibacy, commit to one monogamous relationship.
3. If you do not choose celibacy or a single, committed relationship make sure – as much as possible – to be responsible and cause no harm. In particular be sensitive to your motivation and intent.
4. Whatever choice you make be sensitive to putting yourself into a position that might be misinterpreted.

12. Difficult People

When a person causes us stress or suffering, the gold standard of responses is mettā. An advanced practitioner can do, as the Christians say, love thine enemy as thyself. This, of course, is not easy.

One way to deal with this type of person is to establish mettā for them. We wish them goodwill. This does not mean that you approve of what they are doing. This person may be treating you with cruelty. But imagine for the moment that this person is happy and contented. They would probably not be treating you cruelly. That is the spirit of mettā. You wish them well so they can be happy, and then they will be less inclined to be cruel.

You can wish them mettā in any way that works for you. As described in the *Little Book of Buddhist Meditation*, you can use mettā phrases to wish for their well-being:

May [they] be free from danger.
May [they] be happy.
May [they] be healthy.
May [they] be at ease.

This is the way people start to work with mettā. You are trying to train the mind, to incline it towards happiness, good will and wholesomeness.

A second way to establish mettā is to think of someone you love unconditionally. Children and pets are especially good ways to do this. Then take that feeling and direct it to this person.

These two ways of establishing mettā are a little contrived, but it is where we all begin. As your practice deepens, there are mind states that let you truly experience mettā. In particular, the second jhāna is closely related to mettā. The heart-center, or heart chakra, is the energy center for the

second jhāna. This is also the energy center for mettā. So at some point, when you can attain the second jhāna, play with it a little. Turn your attention from the pleasantness of the second jhāna to mettā. Bring up memories of people who normally would evoke negative mind states. Politicians seem to conjure up particularly negative responses. But in the second jhāna, if you practice mettā you will not be able to hate them. You will feel only love.

I can imagine your response at this point. But this person is terrible! They do horrible things to people! They are cruel, and self-centered! (Joseph Goldstein tells the story of teaching a mettā retreat in New York City after 9/11.) All of those things may be true. This is not about approving of their behavior. It is not even about trying to stop them from unskillful acts. But it is about establishing a quality of heart and mind that does not wish them ill. And this does not preclude your using wisdom to try and get them to behave in more humane ways.

Experiencing mettā in the second jhāna is a taste of liberation. You realize that you do not have to hate anyone. You can connect to anyone's humanity. This may seem like a long way off, and it may be. But this is how an arahant is. The second jhāna gives us a taste of this type of liberation, the freedom from hate, anxiety, fear, and aversion. In the second jhāna the mettā is still conditioned. You won't keep this feeling all the time. That will only happen when you awaken. Then it will be permanent. But until then you get to experience the possibilities.

There is another notion worth mentioning here. In Buddhist psychology there is the idea of a "near enemy." A near enemy is an unwholesome mind state that masquerades as a wholesome one. In the case of mettā – love – the near enemy is attachment. True mettā is altruistic. The only desire is for other peoples' well-being. Attachment is when we want something out of it. That wanting is the problem.

I was at a meditation group once when a woman said that she was afraid of loving anyone because it might end painfully. But that is not love in the Buddhist understanding. There is pain only if there is attachment.

You cannot experience pain if you only want someone else to be happy.

Let's get back to your real-world situation. This person in your life is causing you stress and suffering. You try to wish mettā for them and that isn't working. So we go to Plan B, and that is compassion.

Thich Nhat Hanh says that mettā is "both the intention and the capacity to makes others happy." He also says that compassion is "the intention and the capacity to ease peoples' suffering." That is one way to think about it. With mettā, we want people to be happy. With compassion, we do not want them to suffer. And in Plan B we look into the suffering of our tormentor and see how they create suffering for themselves.

When someone is cruel, no one suffers more than that person. This is true even in extreme cases like physical torture. This may take a while to see and to understand. But take an extreme case like a Nazi or white supremacist. Do they ever look happy? Are they ever at peace with themselves? Do they experience tranquility or serenity? An angry, hateful mind is not a happy mind.

When your boss treats you badly or someone cuts you off in traffic or someone manipulates you emotionally, think about what it is like to live inside such a mind. This can help you feel compassion for them. People who are cruel are lost. They do not understand their own ignorance. They are not aware of their own minds. They do not know how to behave in a skillful way. It is a pretty miserable way to be. They are unhappy and have no idea how to be happy.

The near enemy of compassion is pity.

That is Plan B. But Plan B does not always work, either. So we may need to move on to Plan C, and that is equanimity.

Equanimity is the ability to remain even-keeled.

I have two stories about equanimity and perhaps one of them will resonate for you. The first one is from a surprising source, and that is the

Super Bowl.

In 2001 the New England Patriots won their first Super Bowl. Near the end of the game the Rams, who were highly favored, tied the game after the Patriots had led for the whole game. There were less than two minutes left, and everyone thought that the Patriots would run out the clock and try to win in overtime.

But the Patriots managed to get into field goal range with only a few seconds left on the clock. In order to stop the clock, the Patriots had to "spike the ball." This means they had to line up, get set, hike the ball, and then throw it into the ground.

What I remember most about that moment is how a very young Tom Brady calmly walked up to the line, took the snap, and bounced the ball on the ground. It bounced back up to him, he caught it, and then he turned around and calmly handed it to the referee. I don't think his pulse went up one tick during the whole time. He never even rushed the play.

That is equanimity.

The other story is from the world of Buddhism. This story is also in the *Little Book of Buddhist Meditation*.

Thich Nhat Hanh tells this story. In an incident that has been somewhat lost to history, in 1976 and 1977 many refugees fled the tyranny of the political regime in Cambodia. They left in overloaded, flimsy, rotting boats, many of which sank, and many thousands of people died.

However, some boats survived, and after the fact someone studied why certain boats made it and some did not. There was one common denominator, and that was if there was just one person on a boat who did not panic, that boat had a very high chance of success.

The near enemy of equanimity is indifference. Those who criticize the meditative quality of equanimity are usually referring to indifference. Indifference is disconnected; equanimity is connected. Equanimity is a

bright openness that is not obscured by emotional reactivity. Equanimity is unperturbed by pain; indifference is trying to hide from the pain.

When you are under duress, the safest and easiest thing to do is to turn to the breath. Stay with the breath as best you can. As with sitting meditation, try to expand the breath to fill the whole body. Whatever arises in the mind, simply let it arise and pass away. This should keep you from reacting, or over-reacting, in an unskillful way. It is better to do nothing than to do something harmful.

There will be situations where the best available option is to do nothing. In my experience, this is the most difficult option. But part of developing wisdom and discernment is to know when to quit, when to walk away. This may subject you to humiliation, and it may hurt your pride and your sense of justice. That is why this can be quite difficult.

There is a story that Tony Hillerman tells in his book *The Dark Wind*. Jim Chee is a Navajo police officer, and he is talking to a white woman who wants revenge against the people who killed her husband. But the Navajo have no word for "revenge" or even the concept. This conversation ensues:

> *"Do you understand 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth?'"*
>
> *"I've heard it," Chee said.*
>
> *"Don't you believe in justice? Don't you believe that things need to be evened up?"*
>
> *Chee shrugged. "Why not?" he said. As a matter of fact, the concept seemed as strange to him as the idea that someone with money would steal had seemed to Mrs. Musket. Someone who violated basic rules of behavior and harmed you was, by Navajo definition, "out of control." The "dark wind" had entered him and destroyed*

his judgment. One avoided such persons, and worried about them, and was pleased if they were cured of this temporary insanity and returned again to hozro [harmony]. But to Chee's Navajo mind, the idea of punishing them would be as insane as the original act. He understood it was a common attitude in the white culture, but he'd never before encountered it so directly.

- [Tony Hillerman, *The Dark Wind*]

Sometimes it is best just to cut your losses and walk away.

13. The Buddha's Advice to Lay People

We have already seen some of the advice that the Buddha gave to lay people, such as in the case of money.

I have already mentioned the "Sigālaka Sutta: To Sigālaka, Advice to Lay People." It is rather lengthy and the Buddha gave advice on a number of topics.

One of those topics is the importance of being around people of integrity, people who encourage you to live a happy, responsible way, and in particular people who will not take advantage of you:

> *"Householder's son, there are these four types who can be seen as foes in friendly guise: the man who is all take is one, the great talker is one, the flatterer is one, and the fellow-spendthrift is one.*
>
> *(1) "The man who is all take can be seen to be a false friend for four reasons: he takes everything, he wants a lot for very little, what he must do he does out of fear, and he seeks his own ends.*
>
> *(2) "The great talker can be seen to be a false friend for four reasons: he talks of favors in the past, and in the future, he mouths empty phrases of goodwill, and when something needs to be done in the present, he pleads inability owing to some disaster.*
>
> *(3) "The flatterer can be seen to be a false friend for four reasons: he assents to bad actions, he dissents from good*

actions, he praises you to your face, and he disparages you behind your back.

(4) "The fellow-spendthrift can be seen to be a false friend for four reasons: he is a companion when you indulge in strong drink, when you haunt the streets at unfitting times, when you frequent fairs, and when you indulge in gambling."

- [DN 31.15-19]

One of the striking things about the Buddha's teachings is that they can seem almost hopelessly simple-minded. But then something will happen in your own life, and you stumble across a passage like this, and upon reflection you will have to admit that someone took advantage of you in just this way. Someone will flatter you or get you to spend money on them or something like that, and it may take a long time for you to admit how you were manipulated.

I know an extreme case where a woman got married, and it took a long time for her to realize that not only was her husband spending all of her money, but he was married to two other women at the same time. This sounds like the stuff of tabloids, but it happens, and it happens to people who are otherwise intelligent, successful, and educated. Almost all of us have emotional buttons to push, and some people are very good at finding and pushing them.

So while some of these passages in the Canon may seem simple-minded, I encourage you to think about them seriously. You may have to translate them into modern terms, but I think you will find that they still apply.

Fortunately the Buddha did not just warn us about the calamities that can happen with bad companionship. He was also sure to point out the virtues of a true friend:

"Householder's son, there are these four types who can

be seen to be loyal friends: the friend who is a helper is one, the friend who is the same in happy and unhappy times is one, the friend who points out what is good for you is one, and the friend who is sympathetic is one.

(1) "The helpful friend can be seen to be a loyal friend in four ways: he looks after you when you are inattentive, he looks after your possessions when you are inattentive, he is a refuge when you are afraid, and when some business is to be done he lets you have twice what you ask for.

(2) "The friend who is the same in happy and unhappy times can be seen to be a loyal friend in four ways: he tells you his secrets, he guards your secrets, he does not let you down in misfortune, he would even sacrifice his life for you.

(3) "The friend who points out what is good for you can be seen to be a loyal friend in four ways: he keeps you from wrongdoing, he supports you in doing good, he informs you of what you did not know, and he points out the path to heaven.

(4) "The sympathetic friend can be seen to be a loyal friend in four ways: he does not rejoice at your misfortune, he rejoices at your good fortune, he stops others who speak against you, and he commends others who speak in praise of you."

- [DN 31.21-25]

The Buddha spoke so often about the importance of good friendship. This passage, in particular, has a lovely poetry about it. And here he was

not speaking to monks and nuns. He was speaking to a layperson, Sigālaka. As far as we can tell from the sutta Sigālaka had never met the Buddha before. The Buddha saw Sigālaka "bowing in the six directions" and asked him why he was doing that. Sigālaka told the Buddha that when his father was dying he asked Sigālaka to do this every morning. Sigālaka was a loving and respectful son who was honoring his dead father's wishes. It is a warm and intimate setting for the Buddha's conversation with him.

The Buddha went on to say this:

> *"And how, householder's son, does the Ariyan disciple protect the six directions? These six things are to be regarded as the six directions. The east denotes mother and father. The south denotes teachers, the west denotes wife and children. The north denotes friends and companions. The nadir denotes servants, workers and helpers. The zenith denotes ascetics and Brahmins."* - [DN 31.27]

Now we see the Buddha changing course. As he so often did, he took a common model – in this case the six directions – and used it as a simile for his own teaching.

Another aspect to the Buddha's teachings that may seem quaint is what appears to be an Asian, conservative social model. This is especially true when it comes to having respect for your parents.

I went through this with my mother. For the last 10 years of her life, frankly she gave me fits. My mother was angry and self-absorbed and extremely difficult. I have a hundred war stories.

But whatever that time was like, she was still my mother. We all choose to relate to life in a particular way. It is important to state that this is a choice. In fact, I saw my mother do this. One day I was trying to find a way for her to be a little more positive. I mentioned how many

wonderful friends she had, which was true. She then spent the next hour going through her entire inventory of friends and telling me what was wrong with each of them. So that was her choice.

But my mother was also a remarkable woman. She grew up very poor but loved school. She was only the second person in my family, going back to 1754, to graduate high school. She got a job as a waitress and paid room and board to her parents so that she could finish school. Then she somehow managed to get through secretarial school.

My mother taught herself to play the piano and organ, in a family that did not care about music in the least. I grew up in a household of books and ideas and beautiful music. I was always loved and cared for. I was always fed. I always had clothes. When I was sick, I saw the doctor.

Later in life, after I graduated from college, my mother went to college herself at the age of 50. She graduated while working full-time, summa cum laude, and she did it in just three years. Then a year later she quit her job and went to graduate school full time. At the age of 60 she started a new career as a school psychologist at the Delaware Autistic Program in Newark, Delaware. She worked for 15 years at that job and left with full retirement benefits at the age of 75.

Like so many people, my relationships with my parents were not easy. But because of the Dharma I learned to get over myself. And I know that there are extreme situations where parents do not deserve respect. They are not common but they do happen. But for the majority of us, it is useful to adopt an attitude of love and gratitude, even if the relationships are a very long way from being ideal.

This is a famous passage from the *Aṇguttara Nikāya* about parents:

> *"Even if one should carry about one's mother on one shoulder and one's father on the other, and [while doing so] should have a life span of a hundred years, live for a hundred years; and if one should attend to them by*

anointing them with balms, by massaging, bathing, and rubbing their limbs, and they even void their urine and excrement there, one still would not have done enough for one's parents, nor would one have repaid them. Even if one were to establish one's parents as the supreme lords and rulers over this great earth abounding in the seven treasures, one still would not have done enough for one's parents, nor would one have repaid them. For what reason? Parents are of great help to their children; they bring them up, feed them, and show them the world.

"But, bhikkhus, if, when one's parents lack faith, one encourages, settles, and establishes them in faith; if, when one's parents are immoral, one encourages, settles, and establishes them in virtuous behavior; if, when one's parents are miserly, one encourages, settles, and establishes them in generosity; if, when one's parents are unwise, one encourages, settles, and establishes them in wisdom: in such a way, one has done enough for one's parents, repaid them, and done more than enough for them." - [AN 2.33]

The Buddha began this beautiful passage by telling us that we owe our parents a great debt of gratitude, that "Even if one should carry about one's mother on one shoulder and one's father on the other, and [while doing so] should have a life span of a hundred years…" etc. This is courtesy and respect.

But then he went on to say that if we can teach the Dharma to our parents, then we have repaid them, "and done more than enough for them."

You never know what effect your actions or words will have, so even in a case like mine, where you have a very difficult situation, it is important to behave in a noble, loving way. This may have an influence far beyond

what you know.

In the last week of my mother's life she did not, as far as we could tell, recognize anyone. But when I showed up to see her, for the first time in days she looked at me, and for just an instant there was a twinkle in her eye. Then it vanished. I looked at one of the nurses and said, "Did you see that?" She smiled and nodded.

14. Speech

> *“And what, bhikkhus, is right speech? Abstinence from false speech, abstinence from divisive speech, abstinence from harsh speech, abstinence from idle chatter: this is called right speech.”* - [SN 45.8]

By now the Precept on right speech should be familiar. The first aspect is honesty, truthfulness. As the Buddha told his seven-year-old son, Rāhula:

> *“…Rāhula, when one is not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie, there is no evil, I say, that one would not do. Therefore, Rāhula, you should train thus: ‘I will not utter a falsehood even as a joke.’”* - [MN 61.7]

The Precept on divisive speech is what I call the Fox News Precept. This is speech that is hateful and fear mongering. It causes division and distrust:

> *“Again, householders, a noble disciple reflects thus: ‘If someone were to divide me from my friends by divisive speech, that would not be pleasing and agreeable to me. Now if I were to divide another from his friends by divisive speech, that would not be pleasing and agreeable to the other either. What is displeasing and disagreeable to me is displeasing and disagreeable to the other too. How can I inflict upon another what is displeasing and disagreeable to me?’ Having reflected thus, he himself abstains from divisive speech, exhorts others to abstain from divisive speech, and speaks in praise of abstinence from divisive speech. Thus this*

bodily conduct of his is purified in three respects.” - [SN 55.7]

Then there is harsh speech. This is yelling, being abusive, name calling, and being emotionally manipulative. Its intent is to hurt someone, or to promote your own self as superior to others:

“Again, householders, a noble disciple reflects thus: ‘If someone were to address me with harsh speech, that would not be pleasing and agreeable to me. Now if I were to address another with harsh speech, that would not be pleasing and agreeable to the other either. What is displeasing and disagreeable to me is displeasing and disagreeable to the other too. How can I inflict upon another what is displeasing and disagreeable to me?’ Having reflected thus, he himself abstains from harsh speech, exhorts others to abstain from harsh speech, and speaks in praise of abstinence from harsh speech. Thus this bodily conduct of his is purified in three respects.” - [SN 55.7]

But I want to concentrate here on the one that seems to be the least harmful, and that is idle chatter, or gossip:

“Again, householders, a noble disciple reflects thus: ‘If someone were to address me with frivolous speech and idle chatter, that would not be pleasing and agreeable to me. Now if I were to address another with frivolous speech and idle chatter, that would not be pleasing and agreeable to the other either. What is displeasing and disagreeable to me is displeasing and disagreeable to the other too. How can I inflict upon another what is displeasing and disagreeable to me?’ Having reflected thus, he himself abstains from idle chatter, exhorts others

to abstain from idle chatter, and speaks in praise of abstinence from idle chatter. Thus this verbal conduct of his is purified in three respects." - [SN 55.7]

This is the one that we most often break, and we do so without a moment's hesitation. Anyone who has practiced even a short time has a little guardian angel (deva?) that knows when we are lying, being divisive or harsh. But that angel seems to be on holiday when we are idly chattering away.

Ṭhānnisaro Bhikkhu tells a story about being in Thailand. He and another Western monk were given a task. I think it was to prepare a meditation hall for a ceremony. It was something like that. He and the other monk managed to complete the entire task without speaking. Later one of the lay Thai Buddhists, who observed this, commented on what had happened, saying that he did not think that Western monks were capable of doing anything without speaking.

If you have ever been on a silent retreat you have probably seen this happen. You are on retreat for seven days or ten days or whatever it is, and there is almost no talk. You may say a few words during an interview or for your work job, but that is about it.

Then the retreat ends, and within about seven minutes you would think you are at a soccer match. There is so much chatter, and it gets louder and louder, and you would never know that just 10 minutes ago the hall had been silent. And if you listen in on the conversations, it is almost entirely idle chatter. I got into the habit of cleaning my room and packing my car on the last day of a retreat so that I could leave immediately and avoid the post-retreat cacophony.

I have seen this happen at meditation groups as well. There will be a sitting period, and then there is a short break before the Dharma talk or Dharma discussion. The same thing happens. Sometimes you have to start yelling or wildly ringing a bell to get people to come back into the meditation hall. It is quite discourteous to those who are patiently

waiting.

In the Buddha's teaching the only speech that is really wise or right speech is either a) speech that is for practical purposes of completing tasks or b) Dharma discussion. We see this in this lovely passage about the Buddha's cousin Anuruddha. Anuruddha described how he and his two companions lived:

> *"…whichever of us returns first from the village with alms-food prepares the seats, sets out the water for drinking and for washing, and puts the refuse bucket in its place. Whichever of us returns last eats any food left over, if he wishes; otherwise he throws it away where there is no greenery or drops it into water where there is no life. He puts away the seats and the water for drinking and for washing. He puts away the refuse bucket after washing it, and he sweeps out the refectory. Whoever notices that the pots of water for drinking, washing, or the latrine are low or empty takes care of them. If they are too heavy for him, he calls someone else by a signal of the hand and they move it by joining hands, but because of this we do not break out into speech. But every five days we sit together all night discussing the Dhamma. That is how we abide diligent, ardent, and resolute."* - [MN 128.11-14]

Of course some social speech is necessary. In the Buddha's discourses, his interactions with people often start with preliminary courtesies. You will see passages like this in the Pāli Canon that describe these exchanges:

> *Then Saccaka the Nigaṇṭha's son, together with a large following of Licchavis, entered the Great Wood and went to the Blessed One. He exchanged greetings with the*

> *Blessed One, and after this courteous and amiable talk was finished, sat down at one side. Some of the Licchavis paid homage to the Blessed One and sat down at one side; some exchanged greetings with him, and when this courteous and amiable talk was finished, sat down at one side; some extended their hands in reverential salutation towards the Blessed One and sat down at one side; some pronounced their name and clan in the Blessed One's presence and sat down at one side; some kept silent and sat down at one side.* - [MN 35.8]

But such courtesies should not take long. Generally, you can get almost an entire report on someone's life in a few minutes. On those occasions when I went to a retreat and wanted to see some old friends, I would seek them out as soon as the retreat ended. But it does not take long to express joy at seeing them and to get caught up to date.

Some of us are addicted to social interaction. And these days we have so many ways to facilitate wrong speech. We are on our phones incessantly. We check our email and Twitter and Instagram every few minutes.

The next time you talk to someone, ask yourself afterwards, "How much of that really needed to be said?" This is another mindfulness practice. It is a way to learn how our habitual patterns are controlling us.

15. Community

I want to talk a bit about community. In the Buddhist world, we will almost always become part of a Buddhist community at some point. When we go to a retreat, that is a temporary community. If we have a small sitting group at our house, that is another type of community. And many times we will become part of a larger, more organized local community.

I have been a member of all these types of communities. Inevitably some of them work better than others. There are some characteristics that make for successful communities, and there are characteristics that almost ensure their failure.

We have a unique situation in the West because lay people run many of these Buddhist communities only. This is not true in Asia where the Buddhist leadership is monastic. Because monastics are full time professional Buddhists, they have a certain authority. And the Vinaya provides rules for keeping harmony within the monastic Saṇgha, so lay people follow the lead of the monastics.

When you transport that model to lay-only communities, it does not always translate well. Further, many Buddhist schools have the notion of a guru, someone who "imparts transcendent knowledge." This is a hierarchical structure. These types of organizations have two weaknesses. First, they lack transparency. Second is dependence on a single individual.

The lack of transparency has been sadly evident in Western Buddhism. I have written previously about the many disturbing instances of abuse by teachers. In some cases sexual abuse went on for decades. Dharma teachers also caused havoc by ruining marriages, manipulating people emotionally, and swindling them financially.

There is also a lack of opportunity, often, for criticism. The Buddhist culture is one of respect and deference. That works well as long as the respect and deference are warranted. But as I have written so many times, I have been at retreats where the teachers were saying things that I knew were not true. And it is not part of the culture to challenge teachers. An obvious example is a teacher who said that the Buddha never talked about rebirth. This is an egregious lie. But it was not clear to me that I could challenge it in front of 40 or so other people, or that it was in any way appropriate.

I suppose it is not surprising that the best teachers that I have ever had were also the most open. One of them used to get quite agitated if you did not ask questions after a Dharma talk. He would lecture us on what poor form it was not to question. He said it was positively un-Buddhist.

I once belonged to a group that had a small set of people who were "authorized" to give Dharma talks. I never quite figured out how one became "authorized." Further, they had a rule that within this group they were not allowed to criticize each other's talks.

Another problem that happens frequently is that one or several people who have aggressive personalities end up dominating lay groups. I discussed this once with a senior staff member at a large meditation center. He was getting his Ph.D. in Buddhism and was also studying lay groups to see which ones worked and which ones did not. He was fairly pessimistic about lay Buddhist groups for this very reason. You start with a group of well-meaning people, but then someone wants to be the guru. They want to be the spiritual authority. Almost by definition this is not the person that you want running the group. But that is what ends up happening.

This all sounds very grim, and I don't want to make it sound like running a large lay Buddhist group is impossible. A lot of it depends on the motivations of the people involved. And I think it starts with humility.

It is unlikely that anyone in a lay Buddhist group is even a stream-

enterer. There are some, but it is rare. So as long as that is the case, everyone in the group should be humble about the practice. And if someone is a stream-enterer, I would think they would be naturally humble. Their main motivation will be altruistic. They will want to help people. That is the nature of the awakening process.

(I used to work with someone who liked to say to me, "Eric, you are a humble person, and with good reason.")

Second, the issue of transparency is extremely important. This means especially being self-reflective and self-critical. Good organizations are inclusive. They invite criticism. Just as a craftsperson constantly strives to learn and improve and get better at their craft, an organization wants to do the same. Of course, there is a skill to criticism. One of my best Dharma friends is not afraid to criticize me when she thinks I am going off the rails, but she also does it in a wise and tactful way.

It is important for organizations to ask for feedback and suggestions on a regular basis. There should be at least one anonymous way for this to happen, like a suggestion box. Some people are not comfortable talking in public, and this has to be respected.

I also think that it is important for Buddhist groups to have a clear direction for the practice. There are many ways to practice. This does not mean that it has to be one size fits all. But it is very hard to have a group that is part Zen, part Vipassana, part this and part that. It will not be coherent. It will simply be confusing. There has to be a clear style of practice. Certainly you may venture outside of that every once in a while. I do that in my own practice. But overall there has to be a clear, consistent style of practice.

The Buddha himself suggested that successful communities meet often and do so in harmony. If you read the *Little Book on the Life of the Buddha*, you may recall this conversation between the Buddha and Ānanda:

Now the Venerable Ānanda was standing behind the Lord,

fanning him. And the Lord said: “Ānanda, have you heard that the Vajjians hold regular and frequent assemblies?”

“I have heard, Lord, that they do.”

1) “Ānanda, as long as the Vajjians hold regular and frequent assemblies, they may be expected to prosper and not decline. Have you heard that the Vajjians meet in harmony, break up in harmony, and carry on their business in harmony?”

“I have heard, Lord, that they do.”

2) “Ānanda, as long as the Vajjians meet in harmony, break up in harmony, and carry on their business in harmony, they may be expected to prosper and not decline.

3) “Have you heard that the Vajjians do not authorize what has not been authorized already, and do not abolish what has been authorized, but proceed according to what has been authorized by their ancient tradition?”

“I have, Lord...”

4) “Have you heard that they honor, respect, revere and salute the elders among them, and consider them worth listening to?...

5) “that they do not forcibly abduct others’ wives and daughters and compel them to live with them?...

6) “that they honor, respect, revere and salute the Vajjian shrines at home and abroad, not withdrawing the proper support made and given before?...

7) "that proper provision is made for the safety of arahants, so that such arahants may come in future to live there, and those already there may dwell in comfort?"

"I have, Lord."

"Ānanda, so long as such proper provision is made... the Vajjians may be expected to prosper and not decline."

Then the Lord said to the brahmin Vassakāra: "Once, brahmin, when I was at the Sārandada Shrine in Vesāli, I taught the Vajjians these seven principles for preventing decline, and as long as they keep to these seven principles, as long as these principles remain in force, the Vajjians may be expected to prosper and not decline." - [DN 16.1.4-1.5]

One of the purposes of the Vinaya is to keep harmony in the Saṇgha and to provide mechanisms for resolving disputes. However I am not sure that the Vinaya provides a good model for lay Buddhist groups in this context. It is based mainly on seniority, seniority in the Saṇgha being based on how many years you have been ordained. In the lay world, how many years someone has practiced does not give a good corollary. Many of those years may have been pretty casual. That is certainly true in my life.

It is also important to keep personal information confidential. When people discuss their lives in Dharma groups, they can often talk about things that are quite intimate. I was in a group once where someone admitted to being a sex addict. Whatever the group discusses has to stay there. This is especially important in these days of social media.

If you are a member of a lay group you might consider doing what monastics do, and that is to have a vehicle for confession. In monastic

communities they meet on the new moon and full moon days. On those days they do three things:

1. Recite the Pātimokkha.
2. Discuss community affairs.
3. Confess any breaches of the monastic code.

This can also be modeled in lay groups. You can recite the Precepts and any additional principles such as acting out of respect and humility. You can open the floor for discussion about suggestions to improve the community and resolve any conflicts.

The confession process is a red flag for many people. It reeks of dispensation from some higher authority. But this is not the spirit of Buddhist confession. It is an opportunity for someone to report ways in which they want to improve in their practice.

For most lay groups confession is probably inappropriate unless the members of the group are on very good terms. This is an optional activity. However people may choose a Dharma buddy (or "Dharma Buddhy") with whom to share their practice and life experiences. This should be someone with whom they are very comfortable.

Confession is not an opportunity for the person hearing the confession to offer advice or criticism unless that is asked for. A person simply reports what they want to report and if they do not want feedback they do not ask for it. This is an introspective practice. It is a mirror. And if someone does not have anything to confess or anything they want to confess they can say nothing.

Lay groups often need to handle financial assets to pay rent and handle other expenses. Donations and assets should always belong to the group. Payments should never be given to individuals. This also allows the group to help pay for member's activities. If someone needs help with travel money to go to a monastery, the group can do that. This is the traditional monastic model. The group takes care of the group members and the financial assets belong to the whole group. The assets are there to

support the individual members. Of course if someone can afford these activities on their own, they should do so.

Occasionally the group may have someone come to visit and help with the practice. If that person is a monastic, it is appropriate to pay their expenses and donate to the monastery. If the person is a layperson. the group may offer to pay for their travel.

For certain aspects of practice, it may be necessary for group members to go to a monastery or practice center. I strongly encourage you to only go to centers that do not charge. There are a number of them in the U.S. These include the Metta Forest Monastery, the Birken Forest Monastery, the Arrow Forest Hermitage, and the Bhavana Society. There are others. If you want to go somewhere to practice jhāna, I recommend the Metta Forest Monastery. As I mention in the book on mindfulness and concentration, it will be difficult to attain jhāna without being in this type of setting. Of course, it is also appropriate to support these centers financially if you can.

I will summarize with these thoughts:

1. The leadership of a group has to be open, and inclusive.
2. All members of a group must be humble and respectful, especially when it comes to how they criticize.
3. As the Buddha advises, you should have regular opportunities for group members to criticize and offer suggestions. While in the monastic community formal meetings take place in new moon and full moon nights, in lay groups it is more typical to do this every two weeks. They should at least be once a month.
4. If members of the group choose to do so they may have a short period for confession during the feedback meetings.
5. There has to be a clear mode of practice.
6. Group leaders should all follow at least the first four Precepts (or "seven" as in the seven Precept formulation where the four aspects of speech are broken out).
7. Group members must agree to keep anything discussed in the

group confidential.

8. Financial assets belong to the group and are there to support the practices of the members. This is especially true for those who otherwise cannot afford activities like traveling to a monastery.

16. Forbearance and Patience

The discussion on community leads naturally to a discussion about patience and forbearance.

The Pāli word for patience is “khanti” (Sanskrit: kṣānti). It also means “forbearance.” These two words have slightly different meanings.

Patience is what you need when you are hand-sanding kitchen cabinets. Forbearance is what you need when the neighbor’s dog is barking.

I was at a retreat some years ago, and the people in that group were so sensitive to the slightest noise that I called it “The Princess and the Pea” saṇgha. Of course, we would like silence when we are on retreat. We would like silence when we practice in our own homes or at the local Dharma center. But that is not always possible, and it is not always appropriate. This practice is not about what is out there. It is about what is happening in our own minds.

As with so many aspects of the Buddhist path there is a middle ground, and it is not always easy to know what that is. But in dealing with people, there will come a time when the gift of patience and forbearance is appropriate.

I was once talking to someone who had just come back from a 10-day meditation retreat. When I asked him how it went, he launched into a tirade about the guy sitting behind him who was breathing loudly. If you go to enough retreats this kind of thing will happen. Someone will have a cold or be very restless or something like that, and the mind will go right to a place of suffering. We only go to one or two retreats a year, they are expensive, they take time and energy, and here this guy is wheezing like a freight train and ruining our precious time there.

There is an extreme version of this in a story about a noted Western monk, Ajahn Sumedho. Ajahn Sumedho was the abbot of the Amaravati Buddhist Monastery in England. I tried to find a recorded version of this story but I could not so I hope I get the gist of it correct.

Ajahn Sumedho studied under the legendary Thai forest monk Ajahn Chah. At that monastery, there was a very loud monk who had a terrible time with wrong speech. He was extremely disruptive to the monastery. Ajahn Sumedho was a new monk at the time, and he could not understand why no one did anything about this.

Ajahn Sumedho took it upon himself to solve this problem. He started putting together an ironclad case against the monk. He recorded times, dates, and detailed descriptions of all the instances when this monk was disruptive.

Finally there was a time when it just so happened that Ajahn Chah was away from the monastery. On the next Uposatha Day, which is when these sorts of issues are raised and resolved, Ajahn Sumedho got up and presented his lengthy legal case. He was quite proud of himself. He thought that he had done a great service to the monastery.

He was very surprised, therefore, when no one said anything to him afterward. In fact, many of the monks looked uncomfortable. The offending monk quietly slipped out of the monastery the next morning and was never seen again.

When Ajahn Chah returned, he was horrified to find out what had happened. Ajahn Chah immediately left the monastery, got on a train and tried to find the monk.

When Ajahn Chah got back to the monastery he sat down with Ajahn Sumedho. “Yes,” Ajahn Chah said, “this monk had a terrible problem with wrong speech.” But he was an otherwise good monk. He had been kicked out of several other monasteries because of his loud speech, and Ajahn Chah’s monastery was the only one that would take him in. By humiliating him in such a public way, Ajahn Sumedho had made it

impossible for him to remain a monk.

And that is what I told my friend. “Ah,” I said, “So it was an opportunity to give the gift of forbearance and patience.”

17. Politics

Thich Nhat Hanh: *Deep listening is the kind of listening that can help relieve the suffering of another person. You can call it compassionate listening. You listen with only one purpose: to help him or her to empty his heart. Even if he says things that are full of wrong perceptions, full of bitterness, you are still capable of continuing to listen with compassion. Because you know that listening like that, you give that person a chance to suffer less. If you want to help him to correct his perception, you wait for another time. For now, you don't interrupt. You don't argue. If you do, he loses his chance. You just listen with compassion and help him to suffer less. One hour like that can bring transformation and healing.*

Oprah: *I love this idea of deep listening, because often when someone comes to you and wants to vent, it's so tempting to start giving advice. But if you allow the person just to let the feelings out, and then at another time come back with advice or comments, that person would experience a deeper healing. That's what you're saying.*

Nhat Hanh: *Yes. Deep listening helps us to recognize the existence of wrong perceptions in the other person and wrong perceptions in us. The other person has wrong perceptions about himself and about us. And we have wrong perceptions about ourselves and the other person. And that is the foundation for violence and conflict and war. The terrorists, they have the wrong perception. They*

believe that the other group is trying to destroy them as a religion, as a civilization. So they want to abolish us, to kill us before we can kill them. And the antiterrorist may think very much the same way — that these are terrorists and they are trying to eliminate us, so we have to eliminate them first. Both sides are motivated by fear, by anger, and by wrong perception. But wrong perceptions cannot be removed by guns and bombs. They should be removed by deep listening, compassionate listening, and loving space.

- [Interview between Thich Nhat Hanh and Oprah Winfrey, http://cultureofempathy.com/references/Experts/Thich-Nhat-Hanh.htm]

As I write this we are in the middle of some political challenges in the United States, and I think it is worth saying something about how we relate to politics.

One of the things that Buddhist practice does for us is to put our lives into a larger context. We have been born and reborn and reborn an infinite number of times. We have been beings of every shape, size, and description, We have been men and women, rich and poor, white and red and black and yellow, strong and weak. If you can name a way to differentiate between beings, we have all been there.

Now we are in this life. If you are reading this you are very fortunate because it means that you are interested in the Dharma. You want to cultivate good qualities. That is the purpose of existence.

By putting our lives into a larger context, we also put them into a smaller context. This means that we know that the only way to evolve is breath-by-breath, moment-by-moment. So our lives are both larger and smaller than we had imagined. This is the space in which we live as disciples of the Buddha.

But our old habits die hard. If you have meditated even five minutes you know that. It takes enormous effort to overcome our habits and conditioning.

Then we come to the subject of politics. Yikes.

I am often amazed at how many people who are otherwise kind, gentle, and equanimous turn into oceans of fear and angst when it comes to political discussions. Their otherwise admirable personas go right out the window.

It helps, I think, to look at how we relate to politics the same way that we relate to the rest of our lives. Or marching orders are the same. Our purpose in life is to cultivate good qualities. We want to be compassionate, loving, kind, wise, patient, and understanding.

This does not change because the political climate changes. The world is the way it is. It goes through good times and bad. There are Nazis and there are humanitarians. There is cruelty and there is kindness. This is true now, it was true at the time of the Buddha, and it has been true always.

Because politics tends to be so emotionally charged, the danger is that we forget how we want to be in the world. I grew up in a politically charged era and in a politically active household, so I was born into a life consumed with politics. When I was in college I was originally trained as a community organizer. This is how I thought that I would spend my life, fighting for equal rights, humanitarian causes, and fairness for all people. And that all sounds very noble.

To some extent it was, but it was handicapped by two serious problems. The first was that like many political people I was motivated mainly by anger. The term that a lot of people like to use is “righteous indignation.” You claim the moral high ground, and then you use it to justify a lot of unskillful behavior.

The other problem was that I lacked wisdom. The solutions to many

political problems are not always simple or obvious. In fact, one thing that I learned as an engineer is that the most common mistake that people make it to misdefine the problem. Once you have misdefined the problem you can't possibly come up with the right solution.

Social problems like poverty and racism and war and economic inequality do not have simple solutions, otherwise we would have solved them.

When I see people who are politically active, the first question that I ask is the same one that I would ask in any situation: what is the intention? What is the motivation? And if it is anger, fear, anxiety, greed or ignorance, I have a pretty good idea that the outcome is not likely to be very good.

The problems of the world are so often not about being a member of this or that group or having this or that ideology. They are about poor intention. If something tragic happens and you meet that with anger, the outcome is not going to be very beneficial.

Larry Rosenberg commented once that when he was in the anti-war (Viet Nam) movement there was more anger in those groups then there was in the war.

We demonize people on the other side of the political aisle. What we need is understanding. We need to listen. We need to look beneath the obvious surface problems to the ones that are below, the ones that are fueling the fire.

The political leaders that I admire the most are the ones who stood for social justice with compassion, love and wisdom. They never gave in to anger. Gandhi was that way. Nelson Mandela was that way. Martin Luther King, Jr. was that way.

Nelson Mandela was in prison for 27 years. He used that time to get to know his persecutors. When he was released, instead of getting revenge he used his knowledge of them to make South Africa a more inclusive

society. If you ever want to be inspired by his compassion and understanding, watch the movie “Invictus.”

If we want to be politically and socially active, we must have Right Understanding and Right Intention. Right Understanding is wisdom. Right Intention is altruism.

Every one of us is born into a situation. We come into the world with different temperaments, skills, and inclinations. We are born into different families and backgrounds, different ethnicities, different genders, and different economic conditions. That is the hand we are dealt. Then it is up to us to make something of that. And in our next life we may have a different hand. Maybe we will be on the other side of those fences.

I think most people would like to make a difference in the world. You can do that in many ways. There was an earthquake in South American this year, and there was a local drive to send water filters to the affected areas. That is one type of activity. But it also took a group of engineers and scientists to make those water filters. Someone has to run the company that makes and sells them. They have to be manufactured, packed, and shipped.

You never know what effect a simple action will have. Giant redwood trees grow from the tiniest of seeds. Henry David Thoreau once said, “Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders.” [Henry David Thoreau, Faith in a Seed]

He was speaking about nature, but this happens in human society as well. Thoreau himself was barely known while he lived. He was reclusive and reportedly mildly grumpy. But fifty years after he died he inspired a young John Muir, and the modern-day environmental protection movement began. Decades later a young lawyer named Mohandas Gandhi read his essay “Civil Disobedience” and this gave rise

to the modern non-violent disobedience movement. Sometime later both Gandhi and Thoreau inspired an equally young Martin Luther King, Jr. From that reclusive, obscure, mildly grumpy Henry David Thoreau sprang great redwood trees.

There are people who call themselves "socially engaged Buddhists," but I do not know how it is possible to be a socially un-engaged Buddhist. Sometimes you have to have faith in a seed. Our sitting on a cushion is a radical act. It is a humanitarian act. We practice for the benefit of others and ourselves and for all beings throughout time and space. We are cultivating peace and love and wisdom in our own minds and hearts, and then we become strong, healthy seeds.

Figure: Black Lives Matter Advocate

There is a word that you do not hear very often in Dharma practice and that is "courage." But it takes courage to live a life of quiet dignity, peace, love, and compassion. We vow not to harm. That is the First Precept. And sometimes that means that we put ourselves in harms' way. In recent history in Burma and Cambodia, many monks were killed. In Cambodia there are old monks and young monks, but no monks in between. The Khmer Rouge killed them all.

In Tibet they often use the image of a warrior. Before Tibet became such a peaceful place, it was a nation of warriors. Tibet conquered a lot of Asia. And as it transformed from a military power to a place of peace, they kept a lot of the images of the old warrior nation.

When we face the outside challenges such as in Burma and Cambodia, that is one way to be a peaceful warrior. But we also take on much larger and scarier forces and those are the ones in our own minds.

Figure: Peace Warrior

There was a Tibetan Lama who was held captive and tortured by the Chinese for many years. He finally managed to escape. When he got to India he had a private audience with the Dalai Lama. He told the Dalai Lama how afraid he got sometimes. The Dalai Lama asked him if this was fear for his own life. "No," the Lama said, "I was afraid that if they kept torturing me, I would no longer be able to have love and compassion for them."

Every one of us has to find our way in life. You may run a food shelter. You might be a waitress. You might be a Senator or a cab driver. Wherever you are that is where you meet the world. And if you meet that world with kindness, you never know what kind of redwood tree might grow.

Whatever hand you are dealt, play that hand well and do it with right

intention. Whatever your skill set and whatever your temperament, use that to the best advantage you can. I heard once that Hasidic Jews have this notion of the planet being like a big organization, and everyone in that organization has a job to do. When we all do our jobs, things work well. When we don't do our jobs, things don't go so well.

The world goes up and down, it goes through periods of war and peace, it goes through periods of human advance and decline. But we must stay steady. In the same way we train our minds so that our habits and conditioning do not become the tail wagging the dog, we must stay true, know our direction, and never waver. There is no statute of limitations on love, understanding, compassion, and wisdom. They are timeless and boundless, and they should manifest in us no matter what the current situation is.

By diligently practicing the Buddha's way, we create two invaluable results. One is that we become happier people. Even in the midst of calamity, we can smile.

I heard a story about Larry Rosenberg recently. Larry is a very prominent Dharma teacher, although he has not taught in a while. He is well into his 80's, and recently he had a debilitating stroke.

One day a doctor came in to check on him, and Larry was happily practicing, and he had a smile on his face. Well, the doctor started testing him to see if Larry was conscious and functioning, because the idea that someone who had suffered a serious stroke could still experience serenity and happiness was beyond him. A second doctor came in and did exactly the same thing.

We can be happy, even under the direst circumstances. No, this is not easy, but it possible to develop the mind in such a way. Think about what the Dalai Lama has been through in his life.

The second benefit of our practice is that we are immensely more useful and valuable in the world. I'll start by pointing out the opposite side of this, and this is people who do not practice and who are not self-aware.

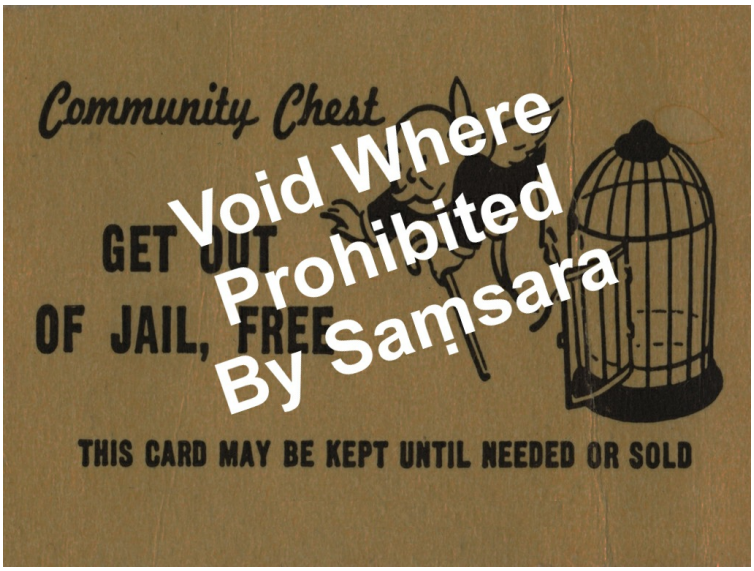
I know someone who is very upset by the current political situation. She spends a lot of time on the Internet getting all fired up about the terrible things that are going on. And as the months have gone by and she has become angrier and angrier, she has become insufferable to be around.

I know another person who has been chronically depressed because of the current politics. But that same person was not so long ago giving me a hard time about being a vegetarian. If she wants to make a positive difference, maybe she could stop eating meat.

Life inevitably contains dukkha. This is life. There are no Get Out of Jail Free cards. This just in: bad stuff happens. The First Noble Truth does not get suspended under special circumstances.

But the Buddha also showed us a way to be happy and useful. We can be beacons of virtue. Sometimes it is easier to look outward. It is the easy way out. It's someone else's fault, and it is someone else's problem. "They" (whoever "they" are) have to change. "They" have to fix things.

It is much harder to look inside and say, where do I need work? How am I contributing to suffering? What do I need to do in order to be more beneficial to the world? By cultivating our minds, we can do less damage, we can be happier, and we can make the world a better place in a substantial way. And that is, I think, the proper response to what is happening now, and what happens always.


Community Chest
GET OUT
OF JAIL, FREE
Void Where
Prohibited
By Samsara
THIS CARD MAY BE KEPT UNTIL NEEDED OR SOLD

18. Sickness, Aging and Death

A discussion about politics and perspective quite naturally leads to a discussion of death. Nothing puts our life into perspective more than contemplating our own death.

There is a joke about Buddhists that we spend our whole lives preparing for death, and there is some truth to that. But people who live well tend to die well. If you find your place in the world, then when it comes time to say good-bye, you can do that with peace and harmony and dignity.

As the Buddha told us, we are all subject to sickness, aging, and death. Perhaps that is your situation now.

Someday we will leave behind all that we know. Some of the people in our lives will leave before we do, and some of the people in our lives will see us leave them. It is the dance of life.

And finally, all that we take with us is the consequences of our actions, our karma.

This is a great incentive to practice. If you are healthy now and your mind is working well, you should use this time to be as diligent as possible. We never know when our bodies or minds will fail us, and then it may not be possible to practice:

> *Three years ago, when I sensed that Ajaan Suwat was about to pass away, I went to see him in Thailand. It was inspiring and heartening to see him, because even though he went through a lot of difficulties after his accident — paralyzed from the base of the spine on down, brain damage, lung damage, having to deal with*

very difficult people looking after him — he always maintained his good cheer. One of the last things he said to me was that he had begun to notice that the perceptions his brain was sending to him were getting weirder and weirder all the time. He had to learn how not to listen to them. Then he said, "But that thing I got from the meditation: That hasn't changed. That's always there."

"That thing" is what he called it. That's the freedom we're working toward, so that no matter what happens in terms of aging, illness, and death, there is always "that thing" there. That's what we want to ferret out. That's what we want to know. So we foster the customs of the noble ones, which focus on taking delight in this path, this path of letting go and developing. You let go of the patterns of thought, speech, and action that get in the way of clear knowing. You develop the qualities that encourage clear knowing: Right View, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration. You learn to take enjoyment in these things. You let them capture your imagination.

- [Ṭhānnisaro Bhikkhu, *Meditations 3*]

There are two ways to look at your life. One way is from here foreword. That is how most people do it. And when you do that, it can conjure up a lot of fear and anxiety.

But if you look at your life from the end backward, the view is a bit different. What will you wish you had done? What will you regret? Now the fear of doing something becomes the fear of *not* doing it, of wasted opportunity.

We do not know what the end game will be like. We will not even be able to trust our own minds. We certainly will not be able to trust our own

bodies. They are going to fail.

So we have to practice diligently. "That thing" that we get from practice will stay with us. It is reliable. And when the body dies, we go on to whatever is next with a good heart and the good qualities that we developed.

Practice helps us to relate in a more skillful way to our deaths. People who die in hospices live longer than people who receive traditional medical care. I think the reason for that is that people who die in hospices are at peace with the idea that they are going to die. They do not fight it.

When people get diseases like cancer, you often hear them use quite aggressive speech. They say they are going to fight their cancer. They say that they are going to beat it. They say they are going to win.

This puts you in an adversarial relationship to your disease. Cancer is just cancer. It is doing what cancer does. There is no reason to be at war with it.

There was a Buddhist writer, Rick Fields, who wrote a book called *How the Swans Came to the Lake*. It is a book about how Buddhism came to the West, and I highly recommend it.

Rick Fields got cancer when he was in his mid 50's and died at the age of 57. When he was in the last year of his life, he said in an interview, "I don't have a life-threatening disease; I have a disease-threatening life."

The great Buddhist nun Ayya Khema was diagnosed with cancer in 1983. After considering all of her options, she decided to leave the cancer untreated and to let it run its course. When she told her doctor that, rather than arguing with her he said that he understood her decision. His mother had died of cancer, and he saw what she went through with the conventional treatments. I saw my aunt die in a pretty horrible way because of the cancer drugs she got. Sometimes the treatment is worse than the disease.

Ayya Khema died in 1997, but almost up to the end of her life she was active and teaching. She lived without fear, and she lived a life of compassion, love, wisdom, and kindness. She is a great inspiration. You should read her book *I Give You My Life*.

To be clear, if you have cancer, I am not telling you not to treat it. That depends on a lot of factors. This is not about what medical decisions you make. It is about coming to terms with your own mortality, with your own death. It is about being at peace with this inevitable part of life.

How we die will probably be pretty much how we live. So yes, we are spending our lives preparing for death. But in so doing we live good lives, and then we at least improve the odds of a good death.

19. Postscript

I have this fantasy that over the next some hundreds of years the United States will become a Buddhist country. That is not to say that all other religions will be squeezed out in some misguided purge. Goodness, no. But it is to say that Buddhist values will predominate. Wouldn't it be wonderful if everyone agreed to follow the Five Precepts? There is nothing particularly sectarian about them. They simply represent a skillful, peaceful, and respectful way to live.

I hope that like Tibet the United States will transform from a country that wants to dominate the planet militarily to one that will lead with peace, love, compassion, understanding, and wisdom. And to do that the United States must continue to live up to its ideal as a place of religious tolerance and freedom.

Given the current political situation you might find that far-fetched. But I have faith in a seed. And that is why what every one of us does matters. We must be those seeds. We must give rise to great redwood trees. We are the peaceful, revolutionary warriors who staunchly stand up to greed, hatred, and delusion. At the moment we are a bit of a fifth column and few in numbers, but that is how these things start.

And if the United States does not step up, perhaps someone else will.

My even greater fantasy is that the human race continues to evolve to become a species that embodies first and foremost compassion.

One of my favorite episodes of the original Star Trek series is one in which the Klingons and the Federation are fighting over the planet Organia. Captain Kirk and the Federation cannot understand why the Organians are so placid and do not mind being pushed around by the Klingons.

It turns out that the Organians have evolved far beyond anything that Captain Kirk and the Federation can understand. Eventually the Organians use their psychic powers to stop the impending violence and war between the Federation and the Klingons. They freeze all the military equipment of both sides throughout the whole of space. And finally we see them revert from their material form, which they adopted just to be polite, into their true form, which is balls of pure, compassionate energy. It turns out that the Organians are devas. Who knew? [Episode 26, Season 1, Star Trek, "Errand of Mercy"]

This fantasy may sound far-fetched, but consider this. In the December 23, 2010 issue of *Mindful Magazine*, psychologist Paul Ekman describes how Charles Darwin believed that altruism is a vital part of the evolution of higher beings:

> *Darwin concluded the discussion of the origin and nature of compassion and altruism by describing what he considered the highest moral virtue. He wrote: "As man advances in civilization, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races. [If they appear different] experience unfortunately shows us how long it is before we look at them as our fellow creatures. Sympathy beyond the confines of man, that is humanity to the lower animals, seems to be one of the latest moral acquisitions... This virtue [concern for lower animals], one of the noblest with which man is endowed, seems to arise incidentally from our sympathies becoming more tender and more widely diffused, until they extend to all sentient beings."*

- [Line Goguen-Hughes, "Survival of the Kindest", Mindful Magazine, December 23, 2010]

You may recognize the phrase "all sentient beings." This is the Bodhisattva vow:

With a wish to free all beings
I shall always go for refuge
to the Buddha, Dharma and Saṇgha
until I reach full enlightenment.

Enthused by wisdom and compassion,
today in the Buddha's presence
I generate the Mind for Full Awakening
for the benefit of all sentient beings.

As long as space endures,
as long as sentient beings remain,
until then, may I too remain
and dispel the miseries of the world.

- [Generating the Mind for Enlightenment]

One of the most compelling qualities in Buddhist practice is faith. This is faith in the Buddha, faith in the Three Jewels, and faith in ourselves. But maybe there is also faith that our simple acts of kindness and compassion, sitting on the cushion, quietly cultivating good qualities, can be part of a much grander scheme. Maybe those redwood trees will be bigger than anything we can possibly imagine.

Those who
Fully cultivate the Factors of Awakening,
Give up grasping,
Enjoy non-clinging,
And have destroyed the toxins,
Are luminous,
And completely liberated in this life.
- [Dhp 89]

Appendices

Appendix A - Glossary of Terms

Abhidhamma (Pāli, Sanskrit: Abhidharma)

> The *Abhidhamma* is the third of the "three baskets" in the Pāli Canon, although scholars date it to 100 to 200 years after the time of the Buddha. It has been variously described as philosophy, psychology, and metaphysics. The *Abhidhamma* is highly revered in the Theravada tradition, and highly criticized in the others (!).

Ajahn (also *Ajaan*)

> Thai word meaning "teacher." In Buddhism it is a monk who has at least ten years of seniority.

Aṇguttara Nikāya

> Literally *Increased by One Collection*, but usually translated as *Numerical Discourses*. It is the second of the five *nikāyas*, or collections, in the Sutta Pitaka of the Pāli Canon. The *Aṇguttara Nikāya* is organized in eleven books according to the number of items referenced in them (i.e., the Four Noble Truths is in the Book of Fours).

arahant (Pāli, Sanskrit: arahat)

> Literally "one who is worthy," a perfected person, i.e., one who has attained nirvāṇa.

awakening

Also called “enlightenment.” It is a sudden insight into transcendent, ultimate truth. This is the goal of the Buddha’s system of training. After awakening one is free from un-necessary suffering, and after death is free from all suffering. In Buddhist cosmology a fully awakened person, or “arahant,” is free from the rounds of rebirth.

Bhante (Pāli)

Literally “Venerable Sir.” A senior Buddhist monastic who has been ordained at least ten years. Although it is a masculine term it is gender neutral and is used for both monks and nuns.

bhikkhu (Pāli, Sanskrit: bhikṣu)

Literally “beggar.” An ordained Buddhist monk. However the term can also refer to anyone following the Buddhist path. When the Buddha gave a talk he would address it to the highest ranking persons there. The rank order was 1) monks, 2) nuns, 3) lay men, and 4) lay women. Thus if even one monk were present, he would address the talk to “bhikkhus.”

Bodhisatta (Pāli, Sanskrit: Bodhisattva)

The term used by the Buddha to refer to himself both in his previous lives and as a young man in his current life, prior to his awakening, in the period during which he was working towards his own liberation.

deva

In the Buddhist cosmology devas are gods or heavenly beings that live in the realm just above humans.

Dharma (Sanskrit, Pāli: dhamma)

In Buddhism, the word “dharma” can have three different

meanings. The first meaning is the *universal nature of how things are*. At the time of the Buddha, each religious school had its own Dharma, or understanding of how things are. The second meaning of Dharma is the *teachings of the Buddha*. The third meaning is *phenomena*. Buddhism sees everything in terms of causes and affects. Mental activities, for example, are *dharmas*. When referring to the teachings of the Buddha, the word *Dharma* is capitalized. When referring to phenomena, it is not capitalized.

Dhammapada-aṭṭhakatha ("aṭṭhakathā" is Pāli for explanation, commentary)

Commentary to the Dhammapada.

Digha Nikāya

The "Long Discourses" (Pāli digha = "long"). It is the first of the five *nikāyas*, or collections, in the Sutta Pitaka of the Pāli Canon. Pāli scholar Joy Manné makes the argument that the *Digha Nikāya* was particularly intended to make converts (Bhikkhu Bodhi pointedly refers to this as "for the purpose of propaganda"!), with its high proportion of debates and devotional material.

Eight Precepts

These are lay precepts for people who want to practice more intensively. They are often observed on Uposatha Days. The additional precepts (to the Five Precepts) are: 1) refrain from eating after noon, 2) refraining from entertainment, wearing jewelry or using perfumes, and 3) sleeping on luxurious beds or over-sleeping.

fetters

Literally a "chain" that shackles one to the rounds of rebirth. The fetters are 1) self-identity view, 2) attachment to rites and rituals, 3) doubt, 4) sense desire, 5) ill will 6) desire for material existence, 7) desire for immaterial existence, 8) conceit, 9) restlessness, and 10)

ignorance.

Five Faculties

Also called the "Five Strengths" or the "Five Spiritual Faculties." They are 1) faith, 2) energy (vigor/diligence), 3) mindfulness, 4) concentration, and 5) wisdom.

Four Foundations of Mindfulness

Also called the Four Establishings of Mindfulness, and the Four Frames of Reference. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness are 1) the body, 2) feelings, or "feeling tones," 3) mental formations, and 4) mental phenomena.

jhāna (Pāli, Sanskrit: dhyāna)

"meditative absorption." The jhānas are states of high concentration. In the final formulation there are four "material" jhānas and four "immaterial" jhānas.

kōan (Japanese, also kung-an)

A kōan is a riddle or puzzle that Zen Buddhists use during meditation to overcome conceptual thinking in order to unravel a greater truth.

Majjhima Nikāya

The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha. It is the second of the five *nikāyas*, or collections, in the Sutta Pitaka of the Pāli Canon. It is generally believed to be the most important collection of discourses in the Canon. The *Majjhima Nikāya* corresponds to the *Madhyama Āgama* which survives in two Chinese translations. Fragments also exist in Sanskrit and Tibetan.

Māra (Pāli, Sanskrit)

Literally "bringer of death." Māra is a deity who embodies the ability of experience, especially sensory experience, to seduce and trap the mind, particularly to prevent the cessation of suffering.

nibbāna (Pāli, Sanskrit: nirvāṇa)

Nibbāna is one of the terms that is used to define the goal of the Buddhist path. It literally means "to extinguish," and means to extinguish the three flames of greed, hatred, and delusion.

non-returner (Pāli, Sanskrit: anāgāmi)

The third of four stages of awakening. A non-returner eliminates the fourth and fifth "fetters" – sense craving and ill-will – and will become an arahant with no more rebirths in the material realm.

once-returner (Pāli: sakadāgāmin, Sanskrit: sakṛdāmin)

The second of four stages of awakening. A once-returner has weakened the fourth and fifth "fetters" – sense craving and ill-will – and will become an arahant with no more than one more rebirth in the material realm.

Pāli Canon

The Pāli Canon is the collection of Buddhist texts preserved in the Pāli language. It consists of three *Pitakas*, or "baskets." These are the *Vinaya Pitaka* (the monastic code), the *Sutta Pitaka* (the discourses of the Buddha and his senior disciples), and the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, a later work that is variously described as Buddhist philosophy, psychology, and metaphysics. The Abhidhamma Pitaka is unique to Theravada, or southern, Buddhism; the other collections have versions in the Chinese and Tibetan Canons.

parinibbāna (Pāli, Sanskrit: parinirvāṇa)

Literally "nibbāna after death." When the body of an arahant dies,

this frees the being from saṃsara, the rounds of rebirth.

Pātimokkha (Pāli, Sanskrit: Prātimokṣa)

Literally "towards liberation." It is the list of monastic rules in the Vinaya.

Saṇgha (Pāli, Sanskrit: saṃgha)

Literally "community." At the time of the Buddha the term Saṇgha referred either to the community of monastics (monks and nuns) or the noble Saṇgha, which is the community of people who are stream-enterers, once-returners, non-returners, and arahants.

Satipaṭṭhāna (Pāli)

The "Four Foundations of Mindfulness": (1) the body, (2), feelings/sensations, (3) mental formations (thoughts and emotions), and (4) *dharmas*, or phenomena.

Samaṇa (Pāli, Sanskrit: Śramaṇa)

A wandering ascetic.

Saṃyutta Nikāya

The Connected Discourses. It is the third of the five *nikāyas*, or collections, in the Sutta Pitaka of the Pāli Canon. *The Saṃyutta Nikāya* consists of fifty-six chapters, each governed by a unifying theme that binds together the Buddha's suttas or discourses.

Seven Factors of Awakening (enlightenment)

(1) Mindfulness, (2) investigation, (3) energy, (4) joy/rapture, (5) tranquility, (6) concentration, and (7) equanimity.

stream-entry (Pāli: sotāpanna, Sanskrit: srotāpanna)

The first of four stages of awakening. A stream-enterer overcomes the first three "fetters" – self view, attachment to rites and rituals and skeptical doubt – and will become an arahant in no more than seven lifetimes with no rebirths in the lower realms.

sutta (Pāli, Sanskrit: sutra)

A discourse of the Buddha or one of his disciples. The Pāli word "sutta" refers specifically to the Pāli Canon. The words "sutta" and the Sanskrit form "sutra" literally mean "thread," and are related to the English word "suture."

Tathāgata (Pāli, Sanskrit)

A word the Buddha used when referring to himself. It's literal meaning is ambiguous. It can mean either "thus gone" (tathā-gata) or "thus come" (tathā-āgata). It is probably intentionally ambiguous, meaning that the Buddha, having attained a final awakening, was beyond all comings and goings.

Upāsaka (masculine), **Upāsikā** (feminine) (Pāli, Sanskrit)

Literally "attendant." A lay follower of the Buddha, one who has taken and keeps the Five Precepts.

Uposatha (Pāli, Sanskrit: Upavasatha)

Traditionally held on the new moon and full moon days of the lunar month. This is the day when monastics gather to recite the Pātimokkha (monastic rules) and confess any transgressions. Lay people observe either the Five Precepts or, if they spend the day at a temple or monastery, the Eight Precepts.

Visuddhimagga (Pāli)

Literally, *The Path of Purification*. *The Visuddhimagga* is a Theravada commentarial work attributed to the monk Buddhaghosa, who

formulated it in Sri Lanka in the fifth century CE.

Appendix B - Bibliography

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